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The Man of Steel;

OR,

The Masked Knight of the White Plume.

A Tale of Love and Terror.

BY A. P. MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "THE FIRE-FIENDS," "AZHORT, THE
AXMAN," "THE FRENCH SPY," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MADAME LA BARONNE.

OUR story opens in Paris in the horrid hours
of the memorable year '94.

It was nightfall. An unusual calm for such a
period of strife rested upon the agitated city.
Upon the Seine a boat, containing a single occu-
pant, was gliding straight for the quays of Isle
St. Louis; a second boat, with two occupants, a
short distance above, was shooting obliquely
and noiselessly in the same direction; a third, a
larger boat or barge, was approaching similarly

from a point below. The last contained six
soldiers.

In the gathering gloom these three parties did
not observe each other moving amid the spec-
tral-moored craft that lay still and grim upon
the placid bosom of the water, the twinkling
lights from which seemed like eyes of malevo-
lence seeking for additional terrors in the cloak
of darkness.

The first boat gained the quay, and the per-
son in it, with quick, mysterious movements,
sunk the light craft after having secured to a
ring a strong line attached to the prow. Then,
moving to the left, he vanished as strangely as
his boat, appearing to sink through the very
massive stones upon which he trod.

A few moments later the second boat struck
the stairing of the quay, and was carefully tied.

"Now, then, Perrue, be cautious," said one.
"Oh! if I mistake not, here is the damp imprint
of a boot. Young de Cosgnac must be already
here. Come!"

The two figures moved stealthily to the right,
where they, like the first-comer, vanished as if
by magic.

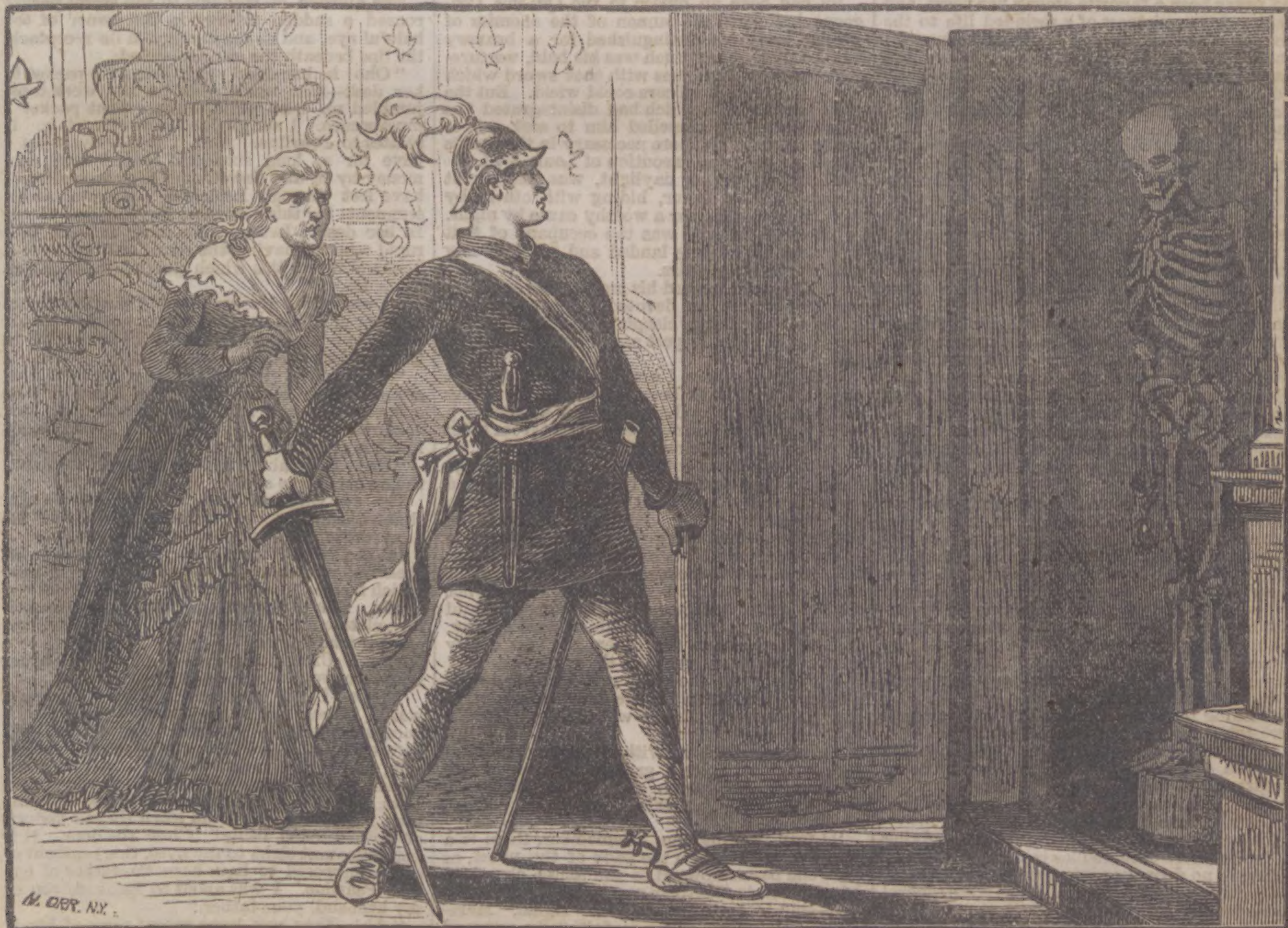
The next and last boat landed at precisely the

same spot, but the armed men it contained were
loud-spoken and coarse, making no effort to
keep the fact of their presence secret.

"Come—hasten with that knot!" growled the
leader, stroking his bushy beard impatiently.
"We have scarce an hour for the performance
of our duty, and who knows but that we may
have some trouble with that brat of the noblesse,
Latour de Cosgnac—ha! There is a boat. The
boat of De Cosgnac, no doubt. Down with the
nobility!—also, down with their boats! Sink
it!" and as he thus commanded, four or five
sharp spikes were driven through the bottom of
the boat, tearing the planking asunder.

"But what of the other—the girl? Eh, Ser-
geant Killer?" asked one of these men. "By
my heart! she is pretty—she is beautiful! I
have seen her. But since these changes in the
government she lives secluded as the mouse in
the field. We have come to apprehend Madame
Elise—we dare not use titles, you know—also
her son, Latour; but what of the girl, Sergeant
Killer? I—"

"Ho! that tongue of yours is a mile too long.
Suffice that I have my instructions from Poillet
St. Liege, and be sure I shall carry them out



LATOUR WRENCHED OPEN THE DOOR. "SEE! UNLESS THIS WRETCHED IMAGE OF BONES HAS VOICE, YOU WERE MISTAKEN."

faithfully, at the cost of my head!" was the reply of burly Sergeant Killer.

"Our true master, Citoyen Robespierre," he added, immediately, "does well in wishing to sweep royalty and the priests from the face of the earth; and Captain St. Liege—whose money and life may the Mother of Fate both preserve for our future use! I may growl it lowly into your ass-like ear—thus—that St. Liege would like to possess the angelic Pearlina," and under his breath: "By the horns of the moon! I would like much to have her myself." Then aloud: "Come, rascals! We shall sip some of the rare wine in the cellar of this fugitive baron, and mayhap shall find some pretty waitresses in the dining-hall. Forward!"

Upon the Isle St. Louis, close to the quays, stood a stone mansion three stories in height, built large and square, having a tower, and whose walls were reputed to be strong enough to withstand a charge of heaviest cannon-shot. Of later years, it had been the residence of Baron de Cosgnac, and as, in those days, it was customary to alter the names both of houses and streets to suit the title of a favorite, or to tickle the vanity of prominent men, this veritable stone fortress was known as *Castle de Cosgnac*. The baron, forced to it by the general movement of other nobles immediately following the return of Louis XVI. from Versailles to the Tuileries, fled to Turin, where he was completely lost sight of—leaving his wife to the care of their son, Latour de Cosgnac, in comparative safety within the hotel-prison-of-a-house; the necessity of this voluntary exile increasing as the Revolution progressed, for its tribunal inaugurated cold-blooded atrocities upon all such as he.

The edifice was imposing viewed from without; its gate-like doors, port-hole-like windows, grim tower, high stone balconies at side and rear, overlooking a garden inclosed by a wall, and the plain, massive front facing the quays with the appearance of a defiant stronghold.

Four of the soldiers, Sergeant Killer at their head, ascended the broad stone stairs toward the "castle" entrance, leaving one of their number to guard the boat.

Within the castle splendor met the eye at every turn—style, finish and furniture attesting the wealth of the exiled noble.

At the moment the first boat arrived at the quay stairs, Madame Elise, Baronne de Cosgnac, was seated alone in her sumptuous bedchamber, intently reading an open letter and anon raising her eyes studiously toward the burnished spears that crossed armorially upon the tops of the four high posts of the curtained couch.

Madame was somewhat advanced in years; an invalid. Her face, once considered beautiful, was thin, pale and careworn. A woman of many virtues, in contempt in those days, she had never been a favorite among her peers, and preferred the quietness of a secluded life to the frivolities and glitter of a grossly immoral court; content with dispensing charities and winning a name for goodness. Living similarly, and under virtuous care, her adopted daughter, Pearlina, had grown to a pure and glorious womanhood.

The apartment in which madame sat was one mass of tapestry, neither door nor window being visible. At one side was a tall, narrow closet of ebony hue, hung with crepe held by immense gilt buckles and surmounted by a cornice studded with beads of steel. In the very center of the ceiling, which slanted on all sides like a square tent of many rich and tastefully-blended hues, shone a multiplicity of lights in a chandelier of glassy prisms.

As she read, her eyes—like all eyes of those Frenchwomen who, by some enchantment of nature, seem to retain at least one mark of their beauty forever—sparkled with a pleasure that appeared to increase upon the perusal of each line, and her bosom heaved with emotion incident to unexpected and promising news, thrilling her whole frame; until, at last, crumpling the letter spasmodically and raising her eyes, she exclaimed:

"The good Father in heaven grant that all may be as my beloved husband wishes and prophesies! Then, I feel that we may be restored to each other's arms and enjoy the sweets of our long, unchanging love in the peace that knows no persecution. This encouragement is panacea beyond all medicine. But, stay: this letter contains information and hints which, if discovered, would soon destroy those plans he speaks of and perhaps bring death to many. Since I have graven its contents on my heart, my next duty to my husband is to burn it."

Reaching toward a small desk that was on a work-table close at hand, she caught up a lighted taper, then began folding the letter with the intention of burning it and crushing its ashes beneath her feet even where she sat.

"Thus will I destroy the evidence of my husband's plot," she murmured.

But as madame was on the point of applying the taper, there occurred an interruption.

Though no doors nor windows were visible in this heavily-tapestried room, there were several modes of ingress and egress which the rich curtaining stuff concealed. One, a door leading to the broad hall without; another, leading to a

room beyond, this second room opening on a stone balcony overlooking the garden, broad, roomy, supplied with seats, and at proper seasons always redolent with the perfume of rarest flowers; a third, a secret panel, supposed to be known only to the baron, his wife and their son—this secret passage leading in two directions: upward to a secret chamber in the tower, downward to a level with the great cellars, thence to the steps of the quay, where a single square stone, worked by admirable contrivances, could be removed or replaced over an aperture sufficiently large to admit the passage of a man. By this secret entrance the occupant of the first boat that reached the quay stairs had disappeared with the intention of gaining the castle unseen. There was a fourth mode, more important than all others, by which one could enter or depart secretly from the bedchamber of the baronne, but this was unknown to the baron, his wife and son.

At the moment when madame was about to apply the folded paper, she detected a noise in the direction of the panel door behind the tapestry.

As she paused and glanced around quickly, the covering before the panel was thrust aside and a man stepped out advancing toward her with a rapid step.

Madame Elise uttered an exclamation of pleasure and half-rose from the large, high-cushioned chair.

The letter and the taper dropped from her hands, and the taper went out with a "puff" as it struck the floor.

"Latour! My boy!"

"Yes, mother mine! I am safely housed again."

The next instant they were clasped together warmly—mother and son.

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER AND SON.

THE man who entered by the panel of the secret passage was Latour de Cosgnac, son of madame—a man, indeed, with every stamp of honor and intelligence prominent in his handsome features.

His supple and finely-developed form was a striking picture of health and muscular strength. From neck to loins he wore a jacket of linked and woven steel; on his head a highly-polished round steel cap with a single peak, surmounted by a long white feather; from beneath the cap luxuriant locks curled about the well-shapen head. At his hip he wore a long, broad, two-handed, double-edged sword, and in his girdle a sharp dagger—two items by no means uncommon in those days when people of all factions went heavily armed, not knowing at what near moment they would be called upon to defend both their honor and life.

He had been an officer in the Queen's Dragoons, had faced the cannon of the enemies of France and was distinguished for a bravery akin to recklessness, such was his bold, venturesome spirit and prowess with that sword which few of his brother officers could wield. But the same popular hate which had disintegrated the Life Guards had compelled him to seek retirement, rendering it more necessary in the events following the cruel execution of Louis XVI.

His abode, during daylight, was that secret chamber in the tower, hiding with others by day, and prowling for a worthy cause by night.

Latour de Cosgnac was the occupant of that first boat which was landed and mysteriously sunk at the quay stairs.

He advanced toward his mother and cast himself at her feet as devotedly as knight ever knelt to fair lady, clasping and kissing her hands with great respect and affection, while he said:

"My dear mother, I am sensible of the fact that you must have been most anxious at my continued absence. Last night, in attacking a large number of *gensdarmes* to wrest from them new victims for the revolutionary tribunal, we were too weak and suffered defeat. Our safety, after that, lay in flight. Until now I have had no opportunity to return without exposure to the emissaries of the committee. That, you well know, would bring immediate destruction to our house; for though they have seen and felt the retributive vengeance of the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume, they do not suspect him to be Latour de Cosgnac, but would discover it if I wore this suit abroad by day. But, tell me: have the others, or any of my good comrades, returned to the tower?"

While he spoke the fond mother looked with a feeling of pride upon the noble face of her son, toyed involuntarily with the ringlets on his brow, and thought:

"What should I do without my own faithful Latour! May Heaven grant him many years of life and usefulness and deliver him soon from the necessity of this life of blood!" Then aloud:

"I fear not, my son. Remember, there is a signal to be given, on the back of the panel, as each one passes upward to the secret chamber. I have been in this room continually—expecting you—and have as yet heard no signal. Moreover, Pearlina, who has so faithfully assumed the duty of carrying refreshments to you and

your companions, tells me that the dishes last taken to the tower have remained untouched. She was with me a few moments since. But, rise, my son, and be seated near me. Your dangerous work—which may God forgive, since it calls for frequent sacrifice of life!—keeps you so much from me, that it is rare pleasure to have you here."

"Speaking of Pearlina," said the young man, rising and leaning over the high back of the chair, "tell me of her, mother. Is she well? Dear girl! I have not seen her for nearly two whole days."

"Well—and much exercised in your behalf. Oh, how she loves you, my son! A jewel, indeed, is our sweet Pearlina!"

"Blessings upon her! She cannot love more deeply than I. It is cruel, but just, that she will not wed me until she is satisfied as to her identity. Is it not strange that we may not even know who she is until her twentieth birthday!—to know only that she was placed, when a helpless infant, in your carriage, and after so many years to receive a mysterious packet from an unknown source—that packet to explain all when she shall arrive at her twentieth birthday; more strange when that grim casket was brought here, containing a skeleton said to have been found in one of the deep dungeons after the fall of the Bastille—having engraved on its skull the mere words: 'This is the father of the child you have named Pearlina.' Her mother, then, may be living."

"It is vain to think of that, my son; useless to conjecture. I have the packet where I may guard it safely. At the date fixed by the instructions written upon the outside—exactly seven days hence—we shall doubtless know all. It is in my desk—Ha! what whisper was that?"

"Whisper, mother? I heard none," and he glanced about the room, astonished at the sudden expression of madame.

She was not mistaken in imagining that she heard a whisper or a hiss, or a noise similar to either, her hearing being much more acute than that of her son; for as she spoke of the mysterious packet her last words seemed to echo lowly back to her as if from an invisible mouth.

In the upper and middle portion of that summer closet already alluded to was a round bored hole scarce larger than a grain of corn which, owing to its smallness, had escaped the observation of mother and son.

Applied closely to the interior of this almost imperceptible hole was a single eye, that would have burned and flamed if exposed to greater light, and this eye spied greedily out upon the occupants of the chamber. They conversed without restraint, and, the door being thin and having in it the hole, their words were distinctly audible to the concealed watcher.

The allusion of madame to the secret packet roused a sudden interest in the owner of the baleful eye, and as she mentioned its receptacle the lips beneath the eye exclaimed:

"Oh! in her desk! She keeps the packet in her desk—that small desk on the work-table jumbled up with embroidery. That packet I must secure. I am glad to know where it is. It relates to Pearlina. And if it tells me what I have for so long suspected then I shall coin money by it, and thereby get back as much as I have lost through Leplanche's abominable assessments for this miserable Revolution. Good! In her desk. Let me remember it"—all in a rapid whisper having the sound of a protracted hiss, and it was this which startled the keen ears of madame.

"I am sure, my son, that I heard either a whisper or a hiss, and I am also positive that it came from there," pointing at the same time to the somber closet.

"It is hardly possible for any one to be concealed there," he laughed, "for it can only be opened by a secret spring the existence of which is known to none but ourselves. I will glance into the closet, however."

"Oh! He is about to look in here?" muttered the owner of the eye.

The eye vanished from the hole, there was a slight movement, the rustle of a gown, and the next instant Latour wrenched open the door.

In the recess stood a perfectly articulated skeleton, white, stark, with that infernal grin which freezes upon the jaws of all well-preserved skulls. This skeleton, upright and tall upon a low, cloth-covered pedestal, was all that met the gaze of madame and her son.

"See! Unless this wretched image of bones has voice, you were mistaken."

"True—I may have merely fancied it; but it was a strong and strange fancy. My son, I once surprised Pearlina kneeling and weeping before that poor skeleton, and I heard her say: 'Oh, my father! Would that the secret of the grave might voice through those too-lifeless jaws, to tell me who or what I am; that Latour, my heart's idol, could learn the sad history of my wretched being!' Close the door. It is not a pleasant sight to my eyes, this remnant of a man supposed to have been the father of our dear Pearlina. I was about to speak to you of my husband, your father."

"Ah! Then you have recent news of him?" uttered the young man eagerly, as he shut the

closet, and returned to lean upon the high back of the chair.

"Yes. He yearns for us. He speaks of fondest hopes for you. When last we had private intelligence of him he was in utter seclusion near the Loire. By reason of the various conflicts and massacres transpiring in that section he was compelled to flee. He and many other nobles, under different names and disguises, are with Bonaparte."

"With Bonaparte?" he echoed, breathlessly. "That name is growing wondrously famous of late."

"Ho! The fugitive baron is with Bonaparte!" mumbled the owner of the baleful eye which was again spying at the hole in the closet door.

"No! so loud, my son. To you I am at liberty to confide his secrets. He speaks of brave Bonaparte as a paragon, climbing step by step, until—what think you he and others plot for?"

"I cannot guess."

"That Bonaparte shall be the savior of France, and, if need be, turn his troops against those men who have inaugurated and would continue the terrible Revolution. And then—what think you follows next, my son?"

"I cannot read the riddle."

"That Bonaparte shall be ruler of France!"

"Blazes!" ejaculated the listener in the closet. "Here is a plot. No doubt all this news is contained in that letter lying upon the floor, which madame seems to have quite forgotten. I must have that letter. Let me remember both the packet and the letter. Eh, now! what's that? Oh! the soldiers have arrived!"

Before Latour could vent the surprised words upon his lips, as his mother disclosed a portion of the plot which history fulfilled, they were startled by coarse, rough voices, cries of alarm and heavy pattering of feet, all mingled, penetrating like a half-smothered and ominous murmur to the tapestried room.

"What can be the meaning of that?" questioned Latour, aloud, his senses ever alert for the secret of danger in those troublous times.

The disturbance grew louder, seeming to approach—voices of angry men and shrieks of affrighted women. Presently there was a distinct call for help.

"By the stars of heaven! there is some outrage perpetrating in the house! Be calm, dear mother, until I return," and flashing forth the great sword from its sheath, he took a step toward the concealed door leading to the hall.

"Hold, there! Be not rash, young man! Blazes! would you destroy yourself?" rung a sharp, shrill voice through the room.

Madame, with a scream, started from her chair.

The door of the closet had suddenly swung wide open, and on its threshold stood the owner of the evil eye that had spied upon madame and her son.

"My son! my son! I knew there was some one in the closet!"

Latour, sword in hand, faced about at that terrified cry from madame, and as he did so, an expression of mixed astonishment and loathing overspread his face.

"Paschal Broeck! Despicable mountebank! How came you here? Speak, ere I drive this weapon through your snake-of-a-body!"

"Blazes! You would murder me!—when I am here to save you and madame from arrest, from the *Conciergerie*, from the guillotine?"

"Explain yourself!"

"Have you ears? You hear that riot in the house, in the halls, and you do not guess its meaning? Blazes! the castle is full of *gens d'armes*. They come to arrest you and madame—why?—because you are of the nobility. They want neither nobles nor the heirs of nobles in Paris. What then?—the Committee; the jury; the judge; the scaffold! To expose yourself would be death, for you would resist, be taken, and your head mounted on a pike staff! Oh! but I am here to save you. I alone can do it. The quay is guarded; escape that way is cut off; so depend not upon the secret passage behind the panel, which I know of. He! halt there! you will be a dead man in five minutes!"—for just then occurred something which caused the young man to leap forward, tear aside the folds of tapestry and dash out into the broad hall.

It was another, a new sound that caused this impetuous action; the voice of a maiden in deep distress, and the words of the voice were:

"Latour! Latour! Help, or I perish! Help!"

"Tis the voice of Pearlina!" shouted Latour, thrilled with the dread of danger to his betrothed; and with the ponderous sword grasped in fingers rigid with muscles of steel, he bounded forward to the rescue.

CHAPTER III.

JACK THE GIANT KILLER.

ADVANCING in regular file, with Sergeant Killer leading, the six ruffian "arrest guard" presently halted at the great front door of the castle.

"Now then! Ho! open here. Down with this door!" bellowed the sergeant, at the same time dealing thunderous blows with the heavy butt of his pike-staff. "Open, I say!" and then

he banged away at the large clapper, splitting it in twain with his burly fist.

After some delay the door swung wide, showing a number of servants gathered in alarm to ascertain what caused such an unwonted clatter at the entrance.

Four soldiers, elbow to elbow, were "dressed" before the door; men with faces of pirates, dirty frocks, rusty helmets, and above the helmets a row of glistening pike-points in admirable drill.

As the door opened the light flooded out from the hall, and in this light Sergeant Killer stepped forward and planted one monstrous booted foot upon the stone sill with a slapping thud that echoed on the air like a pistol-shot.

John Killer was a giant prodigious in strength and height. He wore a pair of colossal boots reaching above the knees; above the knees a beaded apron; above the apron a jacket of black velvet and yellow trimming; above the jacket a neck like a bull; and mounted on this neck a head with a face ferocious as that of the wild tiger of the jungle. A beard the length and spreading shape of a trimmed palm-leaf; a thick mustache like two bunches of twisted wires that stood far out on either side of the hairy cheeks; a pair of eyes as large as an owl's, but fierce, keen, scintillating like those of a cobra; ears like the extended wings of a bat. He was armed *cap-a-pie*—pike, pistol, dagger and saber; and when it is admitted that he was as courageous as he was ugly, this man-monster might be considered a most formidable enemy.

From John, he had been nicknamed Jack. Jack Killer suggested to the fertile minds of his companions an addition in parenthesis, in harmony with his massive build, thus: Jack (The Giant) Killer; hence, for all time afterward, he was known as Jack The Giant Killer more readily than by his *nom de baptême*.

It is easy to imagine that such a man bore not the best of characters, with ferocity and crime gleaming from his terrible eyes.

His rusty helmet was pushed to the back of his head, letting loose the unkempt hair; he placed the other foot upon the sill, opening his cavernous mouth like the jaws of a crocodile, and roared forth, loud as a bull:

"Holloa! Where is the baron? Where is madame? Where is their son? Bring them out. And let us have some wine instantly! Bring us the people and the wine, before you are pinned with pikes to yonder staircase! Be quick!"

The terrific mien, the roaring voice, the ominous demands of gigantic Sergeant Killer—backed, too, by a file of armed men—so affrighted both men and women servants that they immediately set up a loud cry and fled precipitately, some ascending the broad staircase and others seeking escape by the passages on each side of it leading to the rear of the castle.

This staircase, very broad and easy of ascent, was in the center of the main hall, having on the two sides below passages to the rear, and on the two sides above balustraded ways to the front. From the second to the third flat there was a similar staircase.

While several servants, screaming in terror, continued their flight to the uppermost story, a female figure appeared at the head of the first staircase and gazed wonderingly at the scene transpiring below and around her. This was Pearlina.

She was attired in a plain white robe. Over the shoulders and below the waist fell an opulence of hair like the first burst of gold in morning sunlight, and above the brow a band of jewels. Her brows were dark; eyes of deepest blue, radiant with animation—more radiant still the form of exquisite grace which even the loose-fitting robe could not wholly conceal. Her skin was pure and tinted by the wondrous wand of health and virtue—and purer than all the heart that pulsed in her bosom, as it heaved with excitement under the rude stare of these strange intruders.

Even Sergeant Killer was struck spellbound for a second, as she suddenly appeared, seeming more like a dream-vision of indescribable loveliness than a reality.

"By the Virgin's brood! there's a spirit from the clouds!" the bull voice roared. "Ho, up there! You are Mademoiselle Pearlina?"

"I am she. What is your business here?"

"We want the whole family De Cosgnac. We want you. All are to go with us. Descend and give yourself up!"

"You can have no lawful business in this castle. Begone!—I command you!"

"Oh! We shall see about that! Bring her down!" ordered the sergeant, and one of the men strode up the staircase.

"Wretches! You would not dare lay hands on me!" exclaimed Pearlina, riveted with amazement.

"Seize her!" thundered the giant.

It was when the ruffian soldier grasped her rudely that Pearlina uttered the piercing shriek:

"Latour! Latour! Help, or I perish! Help!" She did not know how near her lover was; it was the first impulse of voice that broke from her startled lips, and shaped of itself the name of one who, of all men, should be her defender and champion.

And right quickly came the answer to the appeal:

"Latour is here!"

Beneath the peak of the steel cap, contrived with springs, that it might be pulled down or pushed up at pleasure, Latour de Cosgnac wore a jet-black mask. This mask he lowered as he sprang to succor his betrothed.

There was a sound of swiftly-bounding feet; in another moment the mussy, two-edged sword circled and flashed high in the air. The surprised soldier, who could not retreat from his danger, interposed his pike-staff to receive the blow.

But the shining steel descended through staff, helmet and skull, and the stricken ruffian pitched headlong and lifeless downward!

CHAPTER IV.

THE SWORD OF DE COSGNAC.

THE sudden onslaught of Latour de Cosgnac, and the death of one of their number, caused the remaining ruffian soldiers to look at Sergeant Killer for an explanation and order; but the sergeant, with head thrown back and mouth agape, was, for the moment, too spellbound to move or act.

Latour, striking down the soldier, had immediately said to Pearlina, in a deep whisper:

"Hasten to thy mother, in her chamber. These are not the only intruders in this house to-night. Go you to her—leave me to deal here!"

Pearlina hurried to obey. Latour took a single step downward on the broad staircase, firmly grasping his formidable weapon, and glared from the eyelets of his mask upon the momentarily stupefied soldiery.

The Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume, whose identity was a deep mystery, stood before the startled intruders! and as the giant gazed upon this redoubtable enemy of the *gens d'armes* there instantly flashed into his half-stupefied brain an important discovery, shaped in these thoughts:

"By the Powers of Air! I behold the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume, on whose head a price is set, and whom I never could meet with all my searching! I behold him and his wonderful sword, which, it is said, has split more soldier skulls in the streets of Paris than ever an enemy's lance in the North. He is now before me. I shall capture him. That girl cried: 'Latour! Latour!' And in response appears this Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume. Good! I already feel that he is mine. My head to the executioner if we do not find the face of Latour de Cosgnac beneath that mask! Now, then, we shall smite him; I, Sergeant John Killer, will be the one to conquer him."

"Laches! What want you here?" demanded a gruff voice from behind the mask—a tone so disguised that it could not be recognized as the same gentle voice which had recently conversed with madame.

"Ho! comrades!" shouted the giant, regaining his wits and his courage, and leveling one huge forefinger at Latour, "there is the notorious knight who slays soldiers and rescues the prisoners intended for the verifying Committee! You have heard of him. A good price will be paid if we can bring his neck to the guillotine or his head to our masters—the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume! At him—all! Charge!"

The men charged upward with a mad yell. Jack the Giant Killer drew his own great sword, intending to follow, but he happened to glance toward the side ways of the staircase, and what he saw there brought him to a stand-still.

The male portion of the servants had rallied.

Hating the soldiers of the Revolution and loving the rulers of their home, especially good madame—and some having witnessed the opportune coming of a powerful ally who opposed the intruders with a surprising arm—they quickly gathered courage and surged forward *en masse*, armed with staves and bludgeons, to assist in expelling those evil-looking pirates who demanded the person of their beloved mistress and insulted Mademoiselle Pearlina, whom they adored.

Observing these muttering, crowding, jostling servants—and understanding the significance of the flourishing clubs—the towering sergeant, grunting his contempt for their seeming audacity, resolved to leave to his comrades the task of capturing or killing the masked knight and devote himself to the slaying of this new and numerous foe.

"Ho! By the horns of the moon, you tent-pins!" he growled, like a cross bear. "You dare to declare war against Sergeant John Killer! I shall make short work here, and be about it directly!"

Venting a hoarse, reverberating roar, as if to send terror before him, he charged, with saber at guard.

But he was received bravely. The saber point was beaten down and several cudgels thumped over his helmet and about his ears.

In his rage of pain and anger at the unexpected reception, he was a very demon, wild, wicked, merciless, stabbing and thrusting this way and that with inconceivable fury.

The three who attacked Latour saw too late their error.

That invincible sword whirled fast and telling before the over-confident assailants. Successively the pikes were sent broken and hurtling upward, like rotten branches smitten by a lightning bolt. Then the gleaming, whizzing blade played and flashed upon the three short but well-tempered sabers, as the rogues, discovering the miraculous power and endurance of their antagonist, became the defensive instead of offensive, and slowly began to retreat, fighting for their lives, with Latour closely pressing at every step.

The strife was hot. The hall rung with clashing steel. Presently a shriek of agony blended in the sound of struggle, and only two remained. Soon another cry, and only one was left!

This last surviving ruffian, astounded, terror-struck, by the fearful sweeps and lunges of that two-handed sword, dropped his weapon and turned to flee. But mercilessly came the stroke of the mighty sword, cleaving the rusty helmet as if it were but a shield of paper.

Latour stood alone upon the staircase!

The sergeant, courageous as a bull-dog, as he was, and with not much more sense than that brute, yet had wit enough to realize his own personal peril, and seeing his men go down before that murderous sword, began to think of retreat. Looking at the door he saw that way barred by the crowd of servants. Only one course was open—to rush through the castle to its rear, then through the garden and over the Seine by a swim. A bold course to pursue, but there was no choice if he would escape; so launching his elephant form forward, he broke through the jam and ran for dear life toward the rear of the castle, his iron-shod boots thumping loudly on the mosaic flooring.

A general cry and prompt pursuit followed this act, for those lunges and thrusts of the curved saber, had not all been in vain, and blood flowed from a number of wounded men thirsty for vengeance upon the giant.

On sped the sergeant; on came the eager pursuers.

By a chance unlucky for him, he entered a room without any light and found himself in total darkness. But his enemies were close at his heels; he durst not pause, but continued blindly onward.

At the far end of this room was the descent to the great cellars of the castle, the door of which had been left open. Before the sergeant could realize exactly what had happened to him, he found himself treading in air, and the next instant went bumping down a long flight of stone steps, bringing up in a heap at the bottom. As he scrambled to his feet, almost unhurt, the door above banged shut, smothering a shout of triumph from his pursuers.

"By my mother! I fear I have broken my neck! Five million curses! They have locked me in. I am a prisoner—in the wine-cellar, for I smell the casks. How am I to find my way out? I must get out and report all this to Poilet St. Liege. To a certainty, he will have this infernal castle pulled down and guillotine every man, woman and child in it!"

Groping through impenetrable gloom, he found the wall; following this he came to a high pile of casks. To proceed he must climb over this obstruction—an operation attended with danger; for, as he reached the top of the pile, one of these treacherously-balanced casks rolled from under him, tipping him over, and he shot, head first, downward into a narrow space between the casks and the stone wall.

There was a startled snort as he fell, succeeded by a roar of alarm when he found that the force of the fall had driven his body into the space as tight as a wedge, pinioning his arms to his hips; and thus he stuck, head downward, unable to extricate himself.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE APOTHECARY KNEW.

It would seem that, for some reason, Latour de Cosnac was more annoyed by the knowledge that a man like Paschal Broeck was within the castle—marveling both at his insolence and mysterious ability to enter the private chamber of madame by means of the skeleton closet, which, evidently, connected with a secret passage unknown to the noble family—than he was by the omen signified in the coming of the ruffian soldiery.

With the fall and death-shriek of his last enemy—and without pausing to join in the pursuit of Sergeant Killer—the young man hastened his return to the chamber.

The reader will precede him.

"Oh! You should have aided me in detaining your son!" cried Paschal Broeck, addressing madame very earnestly when Latour had gone.

"And why?"

"You have but one son—one child. Blazes! He will be spitted on the pikes of the soldiers sent here to capture all of you. Most assuredly—yes."

"My son is a true soldier who does not fear death. In a moment of necessity he has no need of my counsel," was the proud reply of madame, as she fully recovered from her first surprise and gazed fixedly at the disagreeable image before her. "Ah! there is the sound of a

desperate conflict—and there a cry of agony. Now may Heaven preserve my darling boy, and pardon bloodshed on my threshold!"

"Blazes! yes. Plenty of blood will be spilt, no doubt. That rash youth will lose a little, I venture. Better depend more on his sword-arm, than on Heaven, in a trial at weapons—"

"You have not answered my son's question," reminded madame, sternly. "How dare you intrude upon the privacy of this chamber, and how came you here?"

He bowed profoundly.

"By that closet, as you have seen—to save your lives, as I have said. It is lucky that there is an avenue of escape beyond that closet. Oh, I am everywhere; I know about everything, in my business and out of it. There is very little that I do not see, hear or find out."

"You are a strange, a dangerous man, Sir Alchemist." She shuddered. This man of mystery—whom she had always met and always avoided because of evil stories circulated freely concerning him—had demonstrated a fact which alarmed her; that there had long existed means of entrance to her bedchamber unknown to her, and she had constantly been at the mercy of others acquainted with the secret who might choose to become her foes and assassins.

Paschal Broeck was a tall, slim man, with a sickly-white, thin, smooth-shaven face: a round chin beneath a broad, narrow-lipped mouth that was set in a cold, phantom-like grin over long, decayed teeth and almost bloodless gums. His nose terminated in a sharp point, and between the nose and the high cheek-bones a pair of eyes small, brilliant, nervous with cunning. He was incased in a black gown with flowing sleeves; his arms in tucks of *crepe*; the hands in the sleeves white and delicate as a high-born woman's. On his head he wore a peakless cap of plain, tightly-fitting scarlet material, giving his crown the appearance of having been scalped.

As if he read in her face the cause of that momentary shudder which convulsed the frame of madame, he said, redoubling the ghastly grin on his countenance:

"Oh! of course. I see you look at the skeleton closet and then around you on all sides, while you say to yourself: 'I have for a long time been in danger of assassination in my bed! But, have no fear. The secret is known only to me and to my faithful servant, Perrue. You call me an alchemist. That is a mistake. I am but a simple apothecary and chemist. I have been a faithful student, however, and know many valuable things. Ay'—and he seemed to swell in a sense of vast personal superiority—"I could startle all France, to-day, by publishing and demonstrating my discoveries! I could convulse whole nations. But an alchemist—no! Some call me a magician, because I can cure those cases of direst disease where doctors most learned withdraw from useless prescribing. But I am neither an alchemist nor a magician. All—everything is science, skill, and the law of study. I am plain Paschal Broeck, apothecary and chemist!"

On several of those visits of charity, for which madame was noted and loved by many whom she assisted, she had encountered the cold-faced, cold-blooded apothecary at the bedside of a sick person apparently doing good with his vast resource of knowledge. But, there was something about the man which made her shun him, and whenever she had looked at him, bending that ghoul face over a suffering but improving patient, she would think:

"I feel in my heart that this Paschal Broeck is a villain of deep dye and well-dissembled mien. He seems to me like a man who only cures those patients to serve some devilish purpose in the future; or like a man with a deep threat in his soul to wreak terrible vengeance upon some one or something for whom or which he is searching, aided by the mingling necessary to his several professions of apothecary, chemist and physician. I have no friendship—rather, a dislike and dread—for Paschal Broeck."

Madame answered him, warningly:

"Beware, man, of so much knowledge. Sorcerers, too, may perish at the *garde-meuble*."

"Oh! I do not require advice, madame," answered the sharp voice. "But, in these days, with France cut off—Paris in particular—from almost all commercial intercourse with the outside world, it is a good time to invent: machinery, food, or—gold. Gold to supersede the filthy *assignat*. Ha! ha! I may invent gold!"

"Again, beware. Remember Noel Picard Dubois!"

"Oh! as for that, the Bastille is no more, and Dubois made of himself a public fool. But will you prefer to remain here, talking idly, and be made a prisoner for the guillotine? Eh? Here is Mademoiselle Pearlina. She can tell us whether your bold and reckless son has perished or not."

Pearlina had not immediately entered the chamber upon leaving Latour. Filled with anxiety for the safety of her lover, she paused at the door where she could catch an occasional glimpse of the furious conflict in progress on the stairs.

Although aware of the proficiency of Latour in the use of his two-handed sword, her heart

stood still, the loving eyes strained, and her lips moved in whispered prayer for him. Then a glad thrill warmed her veins as she saw him approaching rapidly, apparently unhurt. She at once stepped into the chamber, and paused short upon beholding the apothecary, who bowed courteously when he said:

"Eh! Here is Mademoiselle Pearlina."

"Latour is safe. He is coming. Who is this man, madame?" announced and questioned the beautiful girl.

"Blazes!" mumbled Paschal Broeck, in his throat. "Each time I gaze upon this lovely young girl I am more than ever sure that she is the person I have for so long suspected her to be." And aloud, in reply to Pearlina, to whom he was an utter stranger:

"Paschal Broeck, apothecary, at your command," bowing low again.

"A dread man of drugs, poisons and impostures, my dear Pearlina, who comes mysteriously to tell us that we are in danger of the guillotine, and he alone can save us."

As madame spoke, there sounded four smart raps on the panel of the secret passage behind the tapestry.

"Oh!" laughed the grinning apothecary.

"There is one of those who *rendezvous* in the secret apartment of the tower. I am well aware of what goes on up there. But be not alarmed; it is no business of mine."

A low cry broke from madame and Pearlina, as Paschal Broeck betrayed his knowledge of the doings in the tower, and blending with the mutual voices of astonishment there was a second and similar signal—four smart raps—behind the hidden panel.

"Oh! Two!" said Paschal Broeck. "They are coming fast—ha! three. Soon, at that rate, the full complement of six will have arrived. Ah! here is our valiant knight of the two-edged sword, and blood on that sword. He has assuredly put to flight or massacred the *gens d'armes*." Latour, with mask thrown up, and reeking blade in hand, appeared through the hangings of tapestry.

Pearlina threw herself into the embrace of her lover.

"Latour!" immediately cried madame, "this man has learned the secret of the tower!"

"Which does not surprise me," coolly returned the young man, "since it is said that nothing is safe from the prying eyes and sneaking ears of Paschal Broeck."

"A compliment—a pleasure!" answered the apothecary, with another of his profound bows so inconsistent with his usual rat-whisking manners.

"Hark ye, Sir Alchemist: be brief and explicit with your explanations, before I cast you headlong from one of the windows of the castle."

"Blazes! To save my neck, I shall talk with a tongue of lightning. It may be the saving of your several lives that I know so very many secrets. Your fates—all—have been decreed by the Tribunal, and unless you place faith in me, you will soon rest headless in the crypt *Tombeau des Victimes*. By means of a passage known to no one but myself and servant, I entered the castle unseen. My object is to guide you hence by that and another passage, far enough to render further flight easy and safe. I think the government will not molest the castle, since the object that draws its special attention here will be gone."

"Where leads this passage?"

"Down—far down—beneath the Seine—"

"Beneath the Seine!" echoed all.

"To the Catacombs; thence to the upper world in a chapel a short distance from St. Genevieve. It must be a great number of years old. Probably it was utilized by the recluse priest who occupied this castle in the last century. I discovered it in my wanderings through the Catacombs and have greatly improved it. Oh! but it is a novel avenue, an admirable escape—your only chance to get off without bringing down a brigade of city guards to eventually annihilate you and demolish your castle. Blazes! we are wasting time. Come!"

"Halt! One word ere we trust our lives in such hands: what is your motive for this friendly deed?"

Latour, half ready to believe that the offer of the apothecary to guide them to safety was a valuable one—the more so on account of the mother he loved and his betrothed whom he worshiped—still distrusted him greatly and wished to further satisfy himself of Paschal Broeck's sincerity.

At this question, the apothecary straightened up, his hands clinched, his eyes burned with a vivid and singular light of passion.

CHAPTER VI.

TO THE DARK PASSAGE!

FOR several seconds it seemed that the apothecary could not speak, so great was the passion working in his breast. His whole mien changed to that of a man transformed to a hideous fury, choked by excitement and most ferocious of expression, the whole a matter of much astonishment to those who contemplated him.

Then as suddenly the muscles of face and form relaxed, like a stiffened piece of machinery upon

application of oil—this oil the abundant and powerful will of the mysterious man—and reassuming his nervous, rat-like manner, he hissed: "I will easily answer that question. Know, then, that it is because I hate Poilet St. Liege. That is one reason."

"Poilet St. Liege—captain in the Jacobin National Guard! What has that evil scoundrel to do with us?"

"Oh! you have yet to know Poilet St. Liege! He is one who moves the earth itself, if need be, to accomplish a purpose. He has seen Mademoiselle Pearlina. He is captivated by her charms. Blazes! I may tell you that he has resolved to possess himself of mademoiselle!"

This announcement created a general murmur of surprise. Pearlina clung tighter to her lover—as if she felt the despised St. Liege already at her elbow—who exclaimed:

"The dastard! Let me but meet him, and I will sweep him from the earth! Do not tremble, dear Pearlina. Poilet St. Liege will never molest you while I live. Well, Paschal Broeck, I see; you hate St. Liege; to thwart him, you would place my Pearlina beyond his reach, aiding my mother and myself at the same time. You say this is one reason. You have another reason. What is it?"

"For a second reason," continued the apothecary, his snaky, twinkling eyes resting upon Pearlina, "I have a keen interest in preserving the honor of mademoiselle."

The apothecary leaned over, raising one foot, as if to adjust the buckle on his gaiter, but in reality to place upon the centers of the sole and heel, pieces of wax which he took, dexterously and unobserved, from the capacious pocket of his robe.

"You! What can Pearlina be to you?" demanded madame.

"Oh! I do not object to telling you, that, if she is the person I have long suspected her to be, I expect to reap a rich reward by aiding her in establishing herself—ay, aiding more, no doubt, than all the papers which are to be examined seven days hence."

"Then you know who she is?" exclaimed mother and son together, in an eager tone, and failing to remark that portion of his speech which indicated that he knew of the sealed packet.

"Perhaps. But—blazes!—of that another time. This is not an occasion for catechisms. Follow me, instantly, if you wish to preserve your lives and the honor of Mademoiselle Pearlina."

"Mother," said the young man, "I believe this wizard apothecary has sufficient motive to aid us that will warrant our trusting him. To avoid further bloodshed—and for the sake of sweet Pearlina—let us accept his offices as guide. Come."

"My dear son, within the last few moments several have passed upward to the tower chamber. Let me remind you that you had better see them before departing."

"True. Tarry until I return."

Latour disappeared behind the tapestry. Paschal Broeck, appearing perfectly satisfied with this additional delay—and while madame and Pearlina watched the departing young man—advanced further into the room. He halted directly over the narrowly-folded paper that lay upon the carpet—the letter madame had received from her husband—and placed firmly down upon it the gaiter to which he had applied the wax. The length and breadth of the gaiter completely concealed the paper, and the wax caused it to adhere tightly to the sole.

"Oh!" he thought, "I have secured the letter. Next, the packet containing information regarding Mademoiselle Pearlina, who is, I declare, the most beautiful maiden I ever saw." And aloud, pointing to the small desk: "Perhaps, madame, that desk contains important somethings you would not wish to leave behind. You had best carry it with you—not knowing how long a time may elapse before you return."

"Ah! yes. I thank you, sir apothecary. I would not lose this article for all the wealth of worlds"—tucking the desk beneath her arm. "Dear Pearlina, will you bring us hoods and cloaks?"

"Good!" again thought Paschal Broeck, eyeing the desk covetously and pressing more firmly on the folded letter under his gaiter. "Good! I will now soon be in possession of that desk, also, and the prize of a packet it contains."

When he left the tapestried chamber, Latour ascended to the secret apartment in the tower.

In this room were seated five men around a long, oval table littered with books, papers and miscellaneous writing materials. Their rich uniforms and haughty bearing denoted both nobility and high military rank.

Strewn about, or hung upon pegs, were swords and other weapons of war, and at different parts of the table were silver candelabras brilliantly burning their waxen candles. The light shed by these candles was effectually screened from the outside world by thick drapery over the deep, narrow windows.

Latour de Cosgnac, their leader or captain, was received most cordially, all the party rising upon his entrance.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am glad that we

have met again. But I see that one is absent. Where is the Comte de Virmos?"

"He was taken in the *melee* of last night," replied one. "I obtained the news to-day, while disguised and in the wine-shop of Guibert Goel. They sent him direct to the *conciergerie*, which means death."

"Record it," commanded Latour. "And if he perish by the guillotine, the life of a jurymen shall be forfeit. But, hark; I must inform you that Madame la Baronne and myself are among the suspected. The castle has been attacked. I am hot from a battle on the grand staircase, where I slew four pikemen—"

He was interrupted by a murmur of applause.

"As others may soon lay siege to the place, I am about to conduct my mother and Mademoiselle Pearlina to a haven of safety. Whatever happens, I do not suppose that you will be discovered in this retreat. Abide here until I return."

"May fortune favor and preserve madame and the angelic Pearlina!" expressed several, as Latour departed.

The young man quickly rejoined those below.

"Now, sir alchemist, lead on—we are ready to follow you. But mark well: this sword"—tapping the sheath of his weapon—"shall smite off your head the very moment I have cause to think there is treachery."

"Oh! as for that you can walk directly behind me, and be prepared to chop at your pleasure. But now I say—hasten; we have already wasted too much time. Pass ahead of me, while I secure the outer and the secret door, the spring of which I will one day explain to you, Monsieur de Cosgnac."

He paused and motioned them to precede him.

"We obey," said Latour, gently leading Pearlina forward and followed by madame.

The rat-faced apothecary closed the outer door of the closet, and a moment later fastened the secret inner door.

"Let me pass you, now, and lead the way. First, we must have a light."

Producing from his deep pocket a small spirit-lamp—this pocket seeming to be the repository of innumerable articles of convenience—he soon ignited the wick, the flame of which cast a dim, ghostly glimmer.

But before making the light—his movements unseen in the shroud of darkness—he transferred the folded letter from his gaiter to his pocket.

Hardly had the outer door of the closet swung shut, when a huge, bearded, savage face was thrust out from the tapestry at the side of the secret panel, and a pair of wide eyes stared and glared toward the closet.

The visage was that of Jack the Giant Killer! As he stared, he growled:

"By the horns of the moon! that last remark of the devilish knight who handles the double-edged sword will serve the purpose of Sergeant Killer: 'That chapel a short distance from St. Genevieve.' Hol! I will be there. I know the chapel well. I also know, now, that the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume is none other than Latour de Cosgnac. I will have you yet—all; also that abominable apothecary and sorcerer, to whom I owe a lasting grudge. Four necks for the guillotine! Wough!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE PIKEMAN'S DISCOVERY.

IN order to explain by what wonderful stroke of chance the burly sergeant, John Killer, was enabled to obtrude his savage face at that portion of the tapestry concealing the secret panel—the passage leading upward to the Tower, and downward to the quay stairs—it is necessary to look after the guardsman left in charge of the large boat or barge.

Tilting his pike and planting his elbows on the *garde-fou*, he buried his bearded, bristling chin in his two hard palms and winked, sleepy and sullen, at the dark waters and many lights reflecting and dancing upon it far and near.

He noticed the glare of light which poured for a few seconds from the door of the castle, and heard, with wicked satisfaction, the loud demands made by his leader.

"Yes," he muttered, "bring out the dogs of nobility! In good faith, it would suit me better to anticipate the execution, and carry to the Committee the heads of these people mounted on our pike-points."

But the noise of conflict which ensued upon the entrance of Sergeant Killer and his ruffians did not reach the ears of the solitary guardsman, for the great door swung shut and smothered all from the outside air.

"Umph!" he continued, deep in his bristling beard, "I think I can see them in yonder Castle de Cosgnac. My comrades are already busy tying the legs, arms and mouths of the hated noblesse. Presently they will sit down to the feast of wine, and if the servants do not move fast enough, my sergeant will prod them with pikes. Ah! that is excellent wine they are drinking. How it sparkles and tickles! O-o-oua!"—with a monstrous gape—"I will stretch my bones, I think, while waiting for them to

quit the banquet which I know is spread in the dining-hall."

Re-entering the boat, he cast himself full length upon the side seat which extended from bow to transom, and his eyes blinked lazily.

A sudden splash in the water aroused him. Starting upon one elbow, he saw a dripping figure moving to the left a short distance, where it vanished as if into air.

"Eh? I am dreaming!"—rubbing his eyes with a huge double-fist—"or else I saw a man ascend yonder steps."

Again stretching himself, the indolent eyelids were about to close for a brief nap, when a second and similar splash in the water at the foot of the quay stairs startled him.

Another figure—the figure of a man moving silent as a specter through the gloom—passed up and to the left, mysteriously disappearing as the first had done.

Five consecutive forms thus passed the now thoroughly aroused and astonished guardsman; five splashes in the water and the strange vanishment of the phantom figures.

"Now, by my beard!"—when the fifth had gone and there was no sign of more—"I think I begin to see through this. Five swimmers have landed here, and at one and the same point each man has been lost to my view. I will examine that point. There is some mystery. Come! let me look into this."

Scrambling from the boat, the curious pikeman advanced. Being fully awake, struck by the singularity of what he had witnessed, and having marked the precise spot where they were lost to his vision, he felt assured of something—though quite indefinite—which a keen search might reveal.

"By my eyes!" were his thoughts, as he strode up the steps. "If I am caught absent from that barge upon the return of famous Jack the Giant Killer, he will order me brained at sight! But I think I can scent a valuable mystery here, and, come what will, I say again, I will look into it."

These five arrivals who inflamed suspicion in the mind of the pikeman, were those who were seated around the large oval table in the secret chamber of the tower when Latour de Cosgnac repaired thither to announce the projected flight of himself, madame and Paulina—the same who tapped upon the back of the panel to the tapestried room as a signal of their presence—and as the reader is aware, used the same means of ingress as Latour, when the latter landed and sunk his light boat at the foot of the quay stairs—in Chapter I.

These comers—unsuspicious of the vigilance of the sentry in the barge, who was undistinguishable because of the surrounding gloom and his recumbent position—had now unwittingly betrayed themselves; for in a few minutes the guardsman was on his hands and knees to the left, feeling and scraping, while his lips numbed:

"Unless I am an idiot, or cross-eyed, or drunk, those five prowlers disappeared here. As there is no place of concealment near, I imagine that there is a hole or burrow of some kind which—ha! I was sure of it." For at that juncture his forefinger entered a hole or groove, and the next second he had wrenched back a square, thin slab. "So, I am neither drunk, cross-eyed nor an idiot! Here is a burrow, as I foresaw. I will know the meaning of this whole business without delay. Eh?—steps?"—thrusting his head downward into the chaotic depth. "Now, whatever my fate, I, Marcus Baptiste, will find out where this leads to. Here goes!"

Cautiously sounding his way, he entered the hole, and with additional caution drew back into its place the slab above. Lighting a small *torche*, which was fortunately in his pocket, he found himself sitting on a flight of six steps, very narrow, and ahead a passage even narrower, ominously black, the roof of which was hardly higher than the topmost step, and supported by pillars at the side topped with a cross-piece.

Like his leader, Baptiste was a bold, hazing ruffian. Hence, with his hand on the hilt of his dagger—having left his pike in the boat—he at once advanced along this uncertain underground way.

"If this leads me to death or perdition," was his dogged determination, "I shall march to the end, nevertheless. But I think that I am now walking direct to the castle of this outlawed noble. This is some secret way used by these nobility, and should they strive to escape, who knows but I may head them off, then off with their heads. And whatever I discover may furnish an additional cockade for my helmet. Let me be careful, however, that I do not run against a rapier or a bullet."

Marcus Baptiste presently came to a standstill. Before him was another passage, branching obtusely from the one he had been following, and so similar as to render decision upon the further main passage an impossibility.

Without guide or knowledge, it chanced that he selected the wrong one for his purpose—that is, not the one used by the several young noblemen to gain the secret chamber of the tower—and a few minutes later he paused a second time, circling the *torche* above his head.

He was in a spacious subterranean vault,

where an unmistakable odor of corks, cobwebs and liquor, which greeted his snuffing nostrils, indicated that he had entered the wine-cellar of the Castle de Cosgnac. He stood beneath a narrow, keyed-arch, and directly in front of this arch reared a pile of casks, flanked by tiers of bottles, which obstructed view beyond.

But it was not the fact of finding himself in what he knew must be the wine-cellar of the castle that caused him to stop short and flash forth his long dagger. Just as he gained this arch, he heard a deep, fierce, half-strangled voice cry: "A million curses!" then a noise as of one struggling to get free.

Marcus Baptiste was no coward, nor was he superstitious, and considering that guttural and savage accent more in the light of a challenge from some ambushed enemy, he called, boldly:

"Well, it is I, Marcus Baptiste! For a password, look to my dagger! Show yourself, car-ion!"

Then came a roar that the pikeman knew of old.

"Hullo! Marcus Baptiste! This way! I am dying—dying standing on my head! Help, here! Help—and hasten! By the saints!—do you hear! Dying with my heels in the air!"

"Ho!" roared back the pikeman. "That is the voice of Sergeant Jack the Giant Killer! He must be in the wall or under the ground! Or, mayhap it is but some one whose voice wonderfully resembles his—"

He was cut short by another roar, this time furious as well as desperate.

"Forward, there, Marcus Baptiste! 'Sdevils! I tell you I am standing on my head—here—behind these casks! My brain is full of buckets of blood! Help!"

"By my beard!" exclaimed the astounded Baptiste, "I have no longer any doubt that it is the voice of Sergeant Killer! But—"

"Vagabond! Will you hasten?"

"Readily, sergeant—readily. But first, tell me where I am to look? Are you buried, or drowning in a wine-cask, or—"

A third roar, wild and raging, caused the pikeman to hurriedly climb upon the casks, and, guided by the furious accents of the helpless sergeant, he soon discovered a pair of monstrous boots elevated above the topmost row of casks. Below these boots the strangling, wrathful voice of John Killer poured forth its volume of desperation and oaths.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SIGHT THROUGH THE PANEL.

It required considerable skill, as well as all the strength of Marcus Baptiste, to extricate the huge body of his leader from its uncomfortable and dangerous predicament. There was a vast amount of grunting, straining, tugging—for the man was as tightly fast as ever wedge was driven—and eventually success crowned the perspiring efforts of the pikeman.

Once out and safely on the stone flooring, the sergeant shook himself like a huge water-dog after a bath, while Marcus Baptiste stood by staring and wondering.

"By my mother! How came you thus, sergeant?"

"I was running to save my life—pursued by a score of cudgels, and also by a fellow with a two-edged sword! Thanks, comrade, for your timely coming. I would have been a dead man later. What think you, Marcus Baptiste?—I have recently encountered, in this castle, the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume."

"Good! Then he is a prisoner at last?"

"By the seven devils—no! He whipped and killed us all! I tell you I was running to save my life, when I fell behind those casks, head down. A million curses!—I have lost my saber and pistols, and, since this is no further use to me, it might as well go with the rest"—casting aside the empty scabbard. "And my helmet is battered out of shape. It was jammed over my eyes like a band of torture."

"My comrades?" inquired Baptiste.

"All dead—all!"

"By my heart! Where is this Masked Knight? Let us after him! You and I will splinter his two-edged sword and carry off his head. Come!"

"Halt, there!" commanded Sergeant Killer, raising and extending one big fist imperatively.

"Halt, Marcus Baptiste! You are an ass! The fellow with the sword will cut us into four pieces ere you can wink thrice! He is as strong as a tiger; savage and skilled as a demon! Halt! Besides, at the top of those stairs you will meet a shower of clubs and a mob of accursed servants who will brain you in a single minute! I am no coward—neither am I a fool! We will depart by the way you came, whatever way that is, and return with a company of the guard and a cannon or two to blow this abominable castle into millions of atoms—my curse on every atom! I will soon enough have vengeance, never fear!"

"Come, then; we will go by the way I came," yielded Baptiste. "And as we go I will explain by what fortunate chance I was brought to your relief. By my soul! I have my opinion that Castle de Cosgnac is a mine of secrets. And this is one of them." The last as he stepped

from the casks into the archway and waved his palm toward the deem gloom beyond.

"Ho! Jupiter! If there are secrets, it will not take us long to find them out. Turn your torch. First, we will refresh our stomachs." Saying which, he grasped a bottle, mashed off its neck and swallowed the contents, being promptly imitated by his companion. "Now, lead on."

Moving forward, they soon came to the branching passage, round the corner of which Sergeant Killer cautiously thrust his head.

"I think you are right, Marcus Baptiste; this Castle de Cosgnac is a mine of secrets. Here is another passage. These nobles are no better than rats. You say, if we continue as we have started, we will come out at the quay stairs? But I have a notion to try and explore this other passage first."

"I follow you."

Entering this second passage—which, at a right angle, pursued a course back to the castle—they presently found a ladder securely fastened against the wall. Above this was a narrow platform, and upward from the platform another ladder, and so on a series of ladders and platforms, a fact that they were about to ascertain.

"Put out that light. It may betray us," ordered Killer, starting to ascend first.

Having passed several platforms, and as they were still mounting with extreme caution, they heard a footfall directly overhead, as of some one stepping from a ladder to the platform against which the sergeant's head now almost touched. The footfall ceased, evidently not intending to go further down. John Killer leaned over slightly and glanced upward just in time to observe, by a momentary, dim, uncertain light, that the party above had opened and closed a narrow panel, through which he disappeared, instantly closing it and leaving them in total blackness.

"Below, there?" he whispered.

"I am here—well?" answered Baptiste.

"Above us is a door of some kind. No noise. Come. We shall find out what it opens into."

In a few seconds they were on the platform, fumbling and searching carefully about the wall where the secret panel led to the tapestried chamber.

This panel was arranged to slide. To open it from the side of the apartment it was necessary to press firmly, with a single finger, upon a knob no larger than a screw-head. This operation displaced a bolt on the opposite, or inner side, and simultaneously caused another knob or pin, no larger than the first, to shoot outward, as if from the solid wood, serving as a handle to open back the panel.

It was a task of few seconds for Sergeant Killer to discover the bolt on the inside, and trying various ways until hitting upon the right one, he finally moved the panel noiselessly aside and found his nose against the heavy tapestry.

Marcus Baptiste was about to step boldly forward when the mighty gripe of his superior fell upon his arm, detaining him as in a vise and checking an exclamation already on his lips.

For just then the voice of Latour reached their ears, saying:

"As you lead us to the chapel—that chapel a short distance from St. Genevieve—you shall tell us, Paschal Broeck, for what reason you so intensely hate Poilet St. Liege."

Peeping through the interstices of the tapestry, Sergeant Killer beheld all the parties and all that was transpiring within the chamber, and with redoubled astonishment observed the upright skeleton in the closet on its low, sable pedestal.

The moment all had disappeared into the closet, he thrust his shaggy head forth from the drapings—holding his helmet in hand—and immediately stepped forward.

"Ho! Jupiter! A house of secrets, true enough! But, hasten, Marcus Baptiste! Hunt for the door. There must be one somewhere in this place of curtains. Aha! They are going to the chapel a short distance from St. Genevieve going by another of their rat-holes! I know the chapel well! I will be there to meet them!"

"But, see," urged Baptiste, with true burglarious instinct, "we are now sole possessors of this room. Let us get some of the jewels that I know must be hereabout—"

"Plague seize all the jewels! Search for the door! I would rather have the heads of these people—and my reward for diligence—than a tubful of diamonds and rubies. The door!—the door!" And he lumbered hither and thither—Baptiste doing likewise—pushing, pulling and dragging apart the tapestry with impatient jerks.

Finding the hall door, they passed from the chamber on tiptoe.

"Hist, now, Marcus Baptiste! Yonder are the stairs where the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume slew our comrades—"

"May he die by the itch!" interposed Baptiste.

"No doubt we shall find their bleeding corpses at that spot. But there is no time to lose with dead men. Draw your dagger. A brave dash, and we are safely out of this. Then to see Captain Poilet St. Liege. He has an appointment

for a private meeting with citizen Robespierre to-night, and I know where to find him—at the *cafe melange*. Ready!"

The dead bodies of the pikemen, who perished under the sword of Latour, had been removed by the servants, and but for a few blood-stains on the rich carpeting, there was no evidence of the fierce fray which occurred on the staircase shortly previous.

The servants, now, men and women, were congregated in a jostling mass about the door leading to the cellar, loudly debating as to what disposition should be made of the soldier whom they still believed to be their captive. For, the narrow archway being at the furthest end of the cellar, and completely hidden by the pile of casks, which had not been disturbed for a number of years, its existence and facility for escape were unknown to the domestics.

Hence, the two ruffians, daggers in hand, met with no opposition as they dashed down the staircase, out at the front entrance and toward their barge.

The sergeant doubled and shook his fist at the castle, giving vent to a vociferous anathema upon it and all its contents. Then the boat glided swiftly away from the quay, cleaving the water in foam under its bow.

CHAPTER IX.

MASTER AND MINION.

ABOUT the same time that John Killer and Marcus Baptiste rowed lustily away from Isle St. Louis, or, perhaps, a little later, two men were engaged in one of the *cabarets particuliers* of a famous restaurant—the *cafe melange* mentioned by Sergeant Killer at the close of the preceding chapter—situated somewhere near the Palais du Luxembourg.

This public place, besides being superbly managed, had gained wide celebrity on account of the various and striking titles bestowed upon it at different periods.

Prior to the Revolution it frequently occurred that streets were named from some deed of blood, or some remarkable robbery, by the fact of mere filthiness or an existing curiosity.

Built upon the corner, fronting two streets, backing to a dark, dismal alley, it was painted jet black on the side leading to the Seine, and a glaring red on the other or right-angle side. On one side there had been a desperate and fatal personal encounter among a party of brigands from the *Marais*, and the street was called "Rue des Brigands." Upon the second side—the side parallel with the Seine—a notorious junk dealer had perished in the flames of his own establishment, which was destroyed by an unknown incendiary, and this street was called "Rue du Chiffonnier." The alleyway at the back had, for a number of years, been designated as "The Assassins' Causeway." And the restaurant itself, much to the disgust of a succession of landlords, had changed its name to assume prominent identity with each of the unpleasant titles given to the streets on which it faced and the alley at the rear, where a debauched and rioting rabble of inhabitants periodically made night hideous with brawls and blasphemy.

Upon the site of the destroyed junk-shop an establishment for the sale of old clothes had been erected, the business being conducted to considerable profit by its owner, Jean Valasque, a descendant of a noted criminal who made one of those emigrants that had for so long, since the early time of Emperor Valentine, continued to flock into and swell the population of Valenciennes.

Jean Valasque, his second-hand store, and The Assassins' Causeway, will be further mentioned hereafter.

The present proprietor of the restaurant, Roger Bontemps, had just sent up refreshments to the two men who honored (?) one of his private rooms by their presence. A close cab and a flashily-accountered horse stood separately before his door.

One of these men was Poilet St. Liege, captain in the Jacobin National Guard, attired in the rich uniform of his rank; and as he sat bare-headed, overhauling a pile of official papers, he exposed a face stamped with shrewdness, sternness and malignant reserve.

The other man—a being feared, despised, yet in the zenith of a horrible power—was Maximilien Isidore Robespierre, surnamed "the Roman" at the college of Louis le Grand, and surnamed again, subsequently, "Mirabeau's Ape."

In his low, peculiar voice he was questioning and instructing his Jacobin satellite, as the latter went over the papers.

"I have demanded," said the man-fiend, "the daughter of the *ci devant* Comte Philip d'Armant in marriage. I think you asked the privilege of detaining one Mademoiselle Pearlina, of the house De Cosgnac, as your special prisoner, with permission to preserve her life if she will consent to wedding you—"

"If it can be so."

"Very well. We are both infatuated. I, Robespierre, the merciless, am infatuated. Remember on the day of execution that you halt with D'Armant directly before his palace, and delay at that point for twenty minutes. If he finally consents to my proposal—which you will

know by a certain signal—I wish you to instruct that ruffian underling—Killer, I believe, is his name—to see to it that a grand tumult is excited, during which every opportunity shall be afforded the condemned to escape from the cart and from Paris. You understand?"

"Perfectly, citizen," replied St. Liege, in a voice as low and calculating as that of his master.

And in his mind, the officer wondered, as he had many times before:

"How strange that this relentless man—though even more wicked than myself—should have so strenuously opposed martial law before the National Convention, and now avails himself of it, to gratify personal spleen, under the guise of public safety. Such is the vein of inscrutable brains!"

"How works the law for the withdrawal of assignments?" asked the cold, low, hard voice of Robespierre.

"I may say, admirably. The loan fills rapidly, as the document here reports. The people contribute willingly, knowing the benefit." Adding in a few seconds: "May I dare to wonder at your very thoughtful mood to-night?"

"Ay, very thoughtful,"—slow and sibilant, followed by a long-drawn sigh. "Thoughts, St. Liege, have made me what I am—thoughts that I might not have known until the speech of Merlin in the Convention, when the people cried: 'They want a king! But one taken from the Primary Assemblies from which Marat, Robespierre and Danton have sprung! Oh! how those words—that secret monitor—haunted me, until I almost involuntarily aided the prophecy. Perhaps that shadow of the guillotine lies beyond all this, and I may yet follow my own victims, cursed by the rabble, hooted by my present slaves!—"

"Citoyen! You are wandering!"

"Pah! What is life to me but turmoil, contention, and in the end—death! No matter!"—as the moody man aroused from an unusual reverie. "How many necks to-day?"

"Since the order from the Committee of Public Safety, one hundred and fifty heads per day have fallen." This with a shudder.

But the imperturbable demon who listened moved not a muscle, and gazed stolidly at the carpeting as if dreaming on the sacrifice.

"It is my duty, citizen Robespierre," added St. Liege, after a pause, "to inform you that I have here a message from our secret spies, which reads:

"Farquier Tinville himself is filled with horror and abhorrence at receipt of that order from the Committee which commands him to furnish one hundred and fifty heads per day for the guillotine."

"Farquier Tinville shall die before I reach the guillotine!" came whisperingly from the meditative tyrant.

"Citoyen!"

"Oh, mind me not. Well—business"—looking up. "Now, pay close attention. Before to-morrow's sunrise Danton must be in the Luxembourg. It was Marat, Robespierre and Danton. Charlotte Corday has saved me a task. I have at last concluded that I must stand alone!" And he seemed to rear, with his last words, as he had reared in debate before a multitude of colleagues and enemies when once his spirit became warmed to force and fire.

"I fear that man, St. Liege. He has acquired too much of spoils and knowledge. He may undo in a moment what I have been at pains for months to accomplish. One who will denounce the executions of those Girondins is no friend to France or her salvation. He must be removed; and who will dare question when I project?"

"I will attend."

"Whom have we here?" questioned Robespierre, glancing toward the door, where there was a sudden clatter of disturbance.

At that juncture Jack the Giant Killer, having hurled aside the sentry, burst open the door and unceremoniously entered the room.

"Behold me!" he growled, halting midway and saluting.

Poilet St. Liege started to his feet. There was an expectant, impatient expression in his sinister countenance.

"Ah! Killer! Well, what of your prisoners? You have placed madame and her son, separately, in the Conciergerie? You have conveyed Mademoiselle Pearlina to one of the private hotels of detention? Where? All is as I ordered, sergeant, of course?"

He fully expected an affirmative answer. But the words of Sergeant Killer were dropped like so many thunderbolts.

"Ough! By the horns of the moon! I have no prisoners. All my comrades—excepting Marcus Baptiste—were slain by the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume!—slain on the grand staircase of the Castle de Cosnac! I narrowly escaped with my own life to bring you this intelligence—losing my saber, pistols, and having my helmet battered by a headlong fall into the cellars of the castle! But, see: I am armed; I am again Sergeant Killer, always at your service, captain."

With a dire malediction, St. Liege began walking excitedly to and fro, pounding the

palm of his left hand with the fist of his right hand, and almost exploding in passion.

"Dog! You deserve the guillotine for this!" The taciturn Robespierre quietly eyed John Killer, his glance full of scorn and his lips curling in contempt as he asked:

"Can it be possible that a man such as you, backed by half a dozen, was whipped by a single pair of arms?"

"Citoyen!" protested the ruffian, "it is even so. But he was hardly a man. His sword is nearly the length of my pike, doubled-edged, wielded in strokes like the lightning of the clouds!"

"Enough!" broke in St. Liege. "We have lost them!"

"Not so," answered the sergeant, seeing that the moment was presented in which to regain favor. "Listen, captain, to what I have to tell. My comrade, Marcus Baptiste, discovered a secret passage leading to the castle, and by that passage saw five uniformed men enter. We think that the castle had better be razed at once, and have no doubt it will turn out to be a rendezvous of conspirators, all companion knaves of the Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume. I declare—by the horns of the moon!—that I have discovered this troublesome fellow to be none other than Latour de Cosnac!"

"Ah! Possible?" exclaimed both listeners.

"By capturing De Cosnac we also destroy the Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume. Ho! a double stroke. He—they—all—have not yet slipped my fingers. If you will give me an order at the barracks I can make every one of them prisoners before daylight. They can be caught at a chapel a short distance from St. Genevieve."

"My good sergeant, you are an excellent and faithful fellow!" declared St. Liege, instantly altering his demeanor and seating himself at the table to write the required order. "Here it is. Here is another order, appointing your comrade, Marcus Baptiste, sergeant in command, *pro tem.*, to go with a posse and burn, plunder and sweep away forever the detestable Castle de Cosnac. Here is a third order to the officer of the guard. See that an escort is ready for me, within an hour, at Place Vendome. With this last, citizen—to Robespierre—"I intend to arrest Danton."

"Ho! Jupiter! They are going to arrest Danton!" thought John Killer. "Well, I am not surprised. I have long expected it. Citoyen Robespierre will then be head, waist and tail of the animal they call the Conventional Government. So. Let me keep the good-will of this man, who could have my head chopped off by a twirl of his thumb."

The sergeant lost no further time when the three important orders were thrust into his belt. With a final salute—for he keenly feared and was cringing enough before these two potent men—he departed.

Within a quarter of an hour three small bodies of armed men marched from the barracks, each going in a different direction: one toward Place Vendome, one toward the bridge to Isle St. Louis, and the third—mounted on fresh horses—galloping toward that chapel a short distance from St. Genevieve.

"By the horns of the moon!" was the hoarse, triumphant muttering of John Killer, as he spurred smartly on at the head of the cavalymen. "Four necks for the guillotine, and promotion for my pains—thunders of luck! Ha! ha! ha!"

CHAPTER X.

UNDER THE SEINE.

THE apothecary led the way down a long flight of steep, narrow steps built of heavy and well-preserved timber—a way so very narrow that those who followed him did so slowly and with no little difficulty, as the walls were not wide enough apart to admit of the descent of two abreast, and the ceiling, at first was so low that it was necessary for the body to assume a half-stooping position.

Latour firmly grasped the hand of his betrothed, preceding her; madame followed last of all, and so far from the uncertain glimmer of the very small lamp carried by their guide that she momentarily expected to lose her footing and pitch headlong upon those before her. Being also quite weak, her tardiness frequently left her in almost utter darkness, and but for the thoughtfulness of her son she would certainly have fallen.

"Slower, there, magician!" he commanded. "This route is new to us. We have not crawled it as often as you doubtless have, and cannot trot on at will. Besides, madame is an invalid. Do not hasten, dear mother; we shall make this man time his pace to your ability. Ah! what is that? Hold, Paschal Broeck! Have you some wild beast in this lair of yours?"

Directly before and beneath them were two almost phosphorescent orbs, like the eyes of a cat or leopard, full of a dead, treacherous glare, reflected by the tiny flame of the lamp. At their approach, the owner of these eyes struck a light, waving it above his head. It was Perrue, the servant of Paschal Broeck, a young, bright

mulatto with a face of cunning mold and restless, intelligent glance.

Broeck laughed low and carelessly.

"Fear nothing. It is only Perrue; my valuable Perrue. A faithful dog who serves a grateful master. He is the only being for whom I ever felt affection. Poor thing, he is deaf." He addressed the mulatto by signs, which said: "Take both lights and go in advance, Perrue. Hold them high—so." Adding presently: "Now we are passing below the level of the cellars." And again, after a few moments, as they came to a wider portion of the passage and left the steps: "Now we have finished the descent. We go straight forward, with a few turns. You will soon be among the bones in these quarries which are called the catacombs. Ha!"—sniffing the air—"do you not smell cold and dampness? It is the ooze and dripping from the Seine. Be not alarmed. These walls, this ceiling, are strongly pillared and keyed. Come."

The lithe, elastic form of the mulatto moved ahead, his extended arms holding the two lamps high above his head.

"Now, sir apothecary, you will satisfy us of the good cause you have to so intensely hate Poilet St. Liege."

"Blazes! Yes. But, first, I have to betray a secret. Will you hold all sacred that I may speak?"

"Depend upon us. Proceed," assured Latour, placing one arm around the waist of Pearlina as they followed the apothecary.

"Know, then, that my true name is not Paschal Broeck."

"I thought as much," passed in the mind of madame. "I have ever considered this mysterious man a cheat and villain, and that his present name was assumed for some evil purpose."

"The reason for the disguise," added he whom we shall continue to call Paschal Broeck, "is that I may be near Poilet St. Liege, my identity unsuspected, until the time arrives to strike like the serpent coiled in its grassy ambush. St. Liege is the last of an ancient line; I am the last one of my blood. Much of what I know is due to extensive travel and discoveries of accident merely, aided by study and love of research. The object of these travels being to put me finally on the track and near the person of Poilet St. Liege, upon whom I have vowed relentless vengeance! Yet that man never did me personal injury. Blazes! It is the Vendetta! For two centuries the daggers of the descendants of Castor Bonville have drawn the blood of the St. Liege! When I have witnessed the death agonies of Poilet St. Liege, the oath of vendetta is fulfilled and the doom of Corinne is avenged! Oh, it will come! Ha! ha! ha! it will come!"

He laughed diabolically, drawing his breath inward, twisting his hands together and cracking his knuckles, while every lineament—the effect augmented by the sickly blue flicker of the lamps and the tomb-like surroundings—assumed the contortion of a fiend preparing for unholy revel.

His listeners could not repress a shudder. Pearlina clung tightly to her lover, as if she feared that the next move of this suddenly-discovered monster would be to launch his murderous hate upon herself.

"Thou terrible man! Who was Corinne?" exclaimed Latour.

"That you shall hear. As it is some distance to the chapel—and to relieve the monotony of our journey thither—I will give to you the story. Follow closer"—casting a glance to the rear to see whether madame still had the casket safely under her arm.

What Paschal Broeck had to relate was of a romantic as well as tragic nature. And as its results bear directly upon a portion of the plot of this narrative, we give the reader, after our own style,

THE STORY OF THE APOTHECARY.

Seville in the sixteenth century!

A spirit of maze enveloped the vast; strange shadows settled in the skies. The track of the Peri was barred aside, and from the shroud that gathered over the erst rosy vista, myths of ether gazed in lamentation on the epoch of dis-severed souls. Wailings echoed through the vault of heaven, straining to the desolate earth this dirge of sadness:

"Seville, where is thy glory? A midnight pall has draped upon the Moorish city—no more the revel in its palaces, the amours of its terraces of shrubs and flowers budding to the sun. Rent the fair laces of verdure; sick the bloom of the jessamine; sad the accent of thy evening melodies. Thy redolence of breath-kisses from the gleaming Guadalquivir is fraught with sighs; no eloquent nature, now, to symphonize thy dreams. Alas, Seville! All silent thy sweet oracles; dumb in thy darkness!"

It was night—the hour near eight.

A muffled man, wearing a hat so broad that it screened the face beneath, crossed the bridge of Triana and turned into the street of the Gitanos. Though his surrounding was one of menace, he recked not of it; with hasty steps he turned toward a tavern close by.

Gipsies, smugglers, gauchos, were about him, their eyes and manners wild with drink; and but for the blindness of drink and discussion of

maudlin things, they might have paid more attention to the presence of the stranger, for in those times father, son, brother, wife or sister regarded each other with deep suspicion.

But drink, or the results of it, preserved the stranger from any severe scrutiny; and drawing his hat-brim still closer, as he entered the dull glare of lights, he threaded his way through the motley crowd and seated himself at a vacant table.

The Chapa, or "pretty girl" of the establishment, approached him at once.

"Enriquez?" she breathed, cautiously.

"It is I."

"Have you seen Miguel?"

"Yes. . . . But move about the table, or our conversation may attract notice. Yes—that way."

"And what said he, Enriquez?" she asked, obeying his suggestion and appearing to collect the plates of a recent customer.

"I could not persuade him. He is drunk with gold and blind with the pledge he gave—"

"A murderous pledge!"

"True."

"But you were authorized to offer him gold, too?"

"Gold! Gold!" mumbled the man to himself, and clinching his fist on the shining table-top. "It is turning the world into a mill of assassins and plunderers."

"Did you hear me, Enriquez?"

"Yes, yes. I offered and he refused. He is determined to do the deed, if he can find the chance."

"If he can! What do you mean by that? Oh, Enriquez! if there exists one hope to save Marie de Herrera from this horrible woman, Corinne, I implore you—in the name of the holy Virgin!—gladden my heart by speaking it. Think of the favors you and I have known at her hands—"

"There, there, Yva; you distress me. I know. I will prevent it yet."

"How?"

"But I am human; I have my price."

"Enriquez!"

"Nay, do not think me wicked. The price is your hand. I would rescue you from such a life as this—" and involuntarily he gave his hand—his disengaged hand, for with one he gently plucked at the girl's skirt—a motion of disgust, signifying all within the room; its horde of wretches and their tipsy gabbling.

His eyes accompanied the motion of the hand and rested with an uncontrollable glance of hate upon three *familiares* sitting at an opposite table.

The vigilant spies of the Inquisition were everywhere, mingling in all grades, high and low.

"Caution, Enriquez; you have foes here," warned the girl.

"That for my foes!" cried he, unwisely loud, and snapping his fingers.

The three *familiares* had been watching him covertly. As he vented this bold defiance, they exchanged signs among themselves, and though wearing visages as immobile as marble, had any one been beside them, the following might have been overheard:

"Did you mark?"

"I did. Who is he?"

"A strange face for this quarter of Seville," said the first speaker.

"A roving heretic, perhaps," added the third. "He defies his foes. Now, who may those foes be?"

"By his action we may judge that they are everywhere."

"That means our Inquisition; for that alone is everywhere."

"Quite true. Let us watch him well."

The Chapa had noticed those meaning glances and perceived that they conversed with sudden interest. She could not hear the words that passed, but a premonition of evil caused her to tremble.

"Enriquez," she said, "you know that my hand is yours whenever you ask it. Have you not had eyes to discover that much?"

"I only dared to guess. Now I am happy." And but for their surrounding, he would have sealed the troth so briefly agreed upon by a lover's kiss on the red, ripe lips.

"And when shall our marriage be, Yva?"

"Of that another time. You have not yet told me the means by which you will save Marie de Herrera."

"The Garduna," he answered shortly.

"Ah! it had missed my thoughts. Yes, the Garduna will perform anything for money. And you—"

"I will attend to it." Adding, after a pause: "Perchance there will be blood spilled, though. It is because of that I am here to consult you."

"Better shed the blood of the vile than let them perpetrate wickedness."

"That is almost what the Inquisition says, Yva."

"But that is quite a different thing. It is usurpation; it defiles, instead of exalting my religion. It has no right to shed innocent blood in its war upon—" her speech ended with a gasp.

Involuntarily her gaze had turned to the three

familiares. She saw that they were regarding her steadily, and in a second she thought, as her lips gasped, then shut tight:

"Ah! Heaven have mercy! If they have heard what I said I am doomed."

Then the low voice of Enriquez:

"Take care, Yva; it is my turn to warn now. People that have said far less than that are lying and rotting in dungeons."

"Enriquez, you must go. Lose no time. Save Marie de Herrera, and God will bless you with bounty."

Some one, very dear to both, was in imminent peril. Their dialogue in that vitiated place sufficed to show as much.

At that period Andalusia was rife with terrible plots and bold intrigues, and feuds that had long lain dormant were given opportunity for malignant triumphs. Doubtless many lives had been bargained for across the greasy tables of the tavern in which this scene opens, for in the ward of Triana surged an element of population fitted for atrocious deeds. Such negotiations were easily consummated by liberal doses of *manzanilla* and glittering gold.

The Garduna, hinted at by Enriquez as a last and sure resort to secure the safety of Marie de Herrera from the hatred of her enemy, Corinne Bonville, was a mysterious and savage brotherhood which, in and long subsequent to the year 1417, was organized and composed of outcasts ready to serve the most diabolical schemes of men and women who were too cowardly to taste of crime direct. No myth of fabulous creation, but a spot in history that haunts the chronicles of Spain to-day. Their god was gold; and while rapine and lawlessness notorized their existence, they were governed by a Grand Master, known as *hermano mayor*, and subject to him were numerous masters of provinces. They had their *puntadores* for assassinations; *floreadores* for skirmishing or stealing; *fuellos* for spying; *serenas* for decoying; and, lastly, the *chivatos* who were apprentices to the arts and diabolisms of the order.

So powerful was this organization that even the Inquisition found it expedient to form an alliance occasionally. And it was prosperous in its monstrous villainies, continuing its terrors of secret assassination as late as 1822, when Francisco Cortina, a master in the society was dragged to the scaffold.

To this order Enriquez meant to appeal, knowing that, for gold, they would as readily protect a life as sacrifice it.

At the moment when he cautioned Yva to beware of speaking her body into the hands of the Inquisition, he was struck by the sudden pallor which overspread her face. Her eyes were downcast and her slight figure vibrated unsteadily.

"Yva, what ails you? Are you ill?"

"Go, Enriquez—leave this place immediately. No, I am not ill; I—" she stopped, stifling, and her limbs grew rigid beneath her, while the dishes nearly slipped crashing to the floor.

A hand had fallen gently on her bare shoulder—a hand as icy as death—and a voice sibilant, mockingly oily, addressed her.

"Chapa, what is this quibble that keeps you so long over a few dishes?"

It was one of the three *familiares*. His round, cowed face was close to hers; his twinkling eyes were fixed keenly upon her.

"Is it wrong to tarry with one whose friendship is agreeable?" she mustered courage to question.

"No, nor altogether right to reserve the music of your voice for special guests."

"What should it matter to you, if a woman has her favorite?" demanded Yva, growing stronger.

"You forget, sweet Yva, that we, too, may admire a woman, and love her attributes. Now, pray, who is this stranger, that he is privileged above the rest of us! Your lover, as your cheeks confess—but who?"

"A dear friend, simply, and a good one."

Enriquez was boiling with resentment at the intrusion and insolent leer of the *familiar*. Hot words were upon his lips; but Yva continued, quickly, hoping to avoid a collision:

"Do seat yourself. Let me bring you something."

"No, Chapa; I have feasted and I have drunk." Then, transferring his gaze to the stranger: "Thy face is not so new after all, I think," and the words were accompanied by one of those secret signs by which the officers of that period distinguished friends from foes.

Enriquez paid no attention to this.

"Heretic!" then hissed the *familiar*.

"As I believed," chimed in a second *familiar*, joining the group.

"And you have vouched for him, Chapa. A word from us, and you will lose your lover. Ere the next bell for the Angelus we can have him cast into a dungeon."

Yva fairly quivered with dread.

"Oh! have mercy! In what have we offended you?" she moaned.

"In keeping your eyes and person avert from us—"

What more he might have said was checked. A fist rose above the *familiar's* head and he was smitten to the floor.

"Dog!" cried Enriquez, seizing the next by the throat. "I have a ready gripe for all cowards who insult women!" and he hurled the man from him with a force that overturned several benches and landed him under the table.

"Heaven 'fend us, Enriquez! That act will be your death!" wailed Yva.

The voice of the girl was drowned in the instant uproar which filled the room.

"Seize him! The renegade! Seize him!"

A score of men were on their feet; a score of surly visages were turned toward the stranger. The shout of the scrambling *familiar* settled all hesitancy. An officer of the dread tribunal of Seville had been assailed, and a deep, ominous murmur followed the first confusion of cries.

Again the *familiar* incited them on.

"Dolts and laggards! Seize him!—the heretic! Have you not seen? Dare you refuse to avenge this insult to an emissary of the Royal Inquisitor?"

With a few, this was electric. Other *familiares* now glided upon the scene, threatening a descent of the *esbirros*. Worked to a pitch of frenzy and fear, the crowd surged forward.

At this critical poise of things, the keeper of the tavern rushed frantically to the front and threw himself on his knees before Enriquez.

"Whoever you are," he screamed, "have mercy on the house of a poor old man! Let there be no bloodshed here! Surrender yourself; and if you are innocent, the heart of the tribunal will soften toward you—"

"Surrender, my son," urged a *familiar*, advancing.

"Back!" ordered Enriquez, sternly. "I am no fool. I know that, once within the Inquisitorial Palace, the body is already doomed, innocent or not. And for you,"—to the cowering man at his feet—"were you not the father of my Yva, I would kick you. Begone!"

"His Yva!" howled the keeper, perceiving that his best policy would be to side with the crowd. "His Yva! He is a renegade, and dares to steal the heart of my child! Drag him out! Cut off his head!"

"Drag him out! Down with him!" yelled the heaving mass of humans.

Throughout, Enriquez stood calmly. The young girl clung to her lover's arm, and her face wore a piteous look.

"Dear Enriquez! you will be killed!"

"Peace. If you love me, take this,"—handing her a bright, sharp knife. "Now, stand by me, and let them come on. We are ready."

Quick as lightning he had his ample cloak wrapped around his left arm; in his right hand gleamed the deadly *albacete*. Back to back the pair stood and faced their mutual foes.

Other weapons were displayed, and a labyrinth of knives and clubs lay between Enriquez and the door.

Suddenly, and loud above the terrific din a shrill, peculiar and prolonged whistle penetrated to the ears of all. Its effect was magical. Weapons vanished; the crowd slunk back; the *familiar* stood alone.

"Enriquez," panted the Chapa, "what is that sound?"

"The whistle of the Garduna calling off its flock. See—its members have been all around us. We are saved!"

"God be praised! Look there—some one beckons you."

A sinister face was pressing toward the couple from the doorway; its owner was making signs for Enriquez to come out. But he hesitated.

"How can I leave you, Yva, to be sacrificed?"

"Think not of me, but of Marie de Herrera and Huo St. Liege. Go. Hasten, I implore you!"

Taking advantage of the lull, and further urged by the girl, and realizing the importance of the duty yet to be performed, Enriquez ran from the tavern. When he reached the outside the owner of the face had disappeared. But ere he had taken a dozen steps along the tortuous avenue, a figure darted from the shadows and accosted him.

"The palace of the Garduna is there," said the figure, pointing off.

"And how know you that I am in search of it?"

"I heard all you said to the Chapa. Give this into the hand of Mandimienta, and say that its owner sent you," and he slipped a ring with three glittering jewels into the palm of Enriquez, then vanished.

"Ho!" he muttered, when alone. "I am going to the Garduna, and here is a passport to favor."

The house of Manuel de Herrera was a palace in its way, a type of those Andalusian mansions whose fame survives their ruin of long ago.

Its like were numerous, for the symbols of the early labors of the Moor yet lingered to imbue the city of Seville with memories of golden splendor.

At this time the surrounding country was struggling to reamass those losses sustained through the siege of Ferdinand. Its luscious groves and prolific vineyards had been smitten by invaders; population and industry, so lately stricken waste and given to pestilence, could not

raise their glory as of yore, and wealth that had sowed its abundance over the erst happy land, was wrested away by the conqueror to endow new and endless monasteries.

Truly, the lock of doom was on Seville. Her loveliness was sinking fast away, never to shine forth again; and only structures so massy that ravage could not crumble nor hate disfigure were destined to survive the steady onset of decay.

But, the residence of Manuel de Herrera—it's spacious court of dewy freshness, the delicious airs that murmured around its balconies, mingling music in the jessamine and trailing rose; its interior of reflected lights through glass doors and windows, and rich furnishings of Oriental gleam which told the former royalty of some vanished and now impoverished Moor.

Herrera sat alone—an old, old man, tottering on the verge of closing years. In his infirmities none remained to soothe him but Marie, the idol of his existence. As he sat, he was dreaming of Seville, its past, its future. His voice was no more heard in council; the world wore a gloomy aspect for him, and in his reveries the end of the once heavenly city was pictured by unerring fate. Strong men, as well as weak women prayed fervently then; Manuel prayed for the city he loved so well, that it might be redeemed from the bloody whirlpool then dishonoring its soil.

And another, also, prayed. Marie was no longer a child; these days of trial transpired in her eighteenth year, and too well her heart conceived the terrors of the opening pathway of life. Her education had been such as developed a soul of virtue and a mind cultured to both wisdom and humbleness; an image of conscious purity fortified by faith. Never, until now, had she imagined the full danger in possessing a face so grandly beautiful and form exquisite as her own.

It was near midnight.

Marie knelt in the silence of her room, her calm, yet paining eyes fixed upon an image of the Virgin. Above, on a sable cross surmounting her little altar, was the crucified Christ. Before the whole burned a mellow flame of olive.

Her full white robe, with a wealth of hair flowing neglectedly about her shoulders; her pale, lovely face portraying an aching bosom; the clasped hands and whispering lips—all formed a picture sublime to contemplate in its most holy attitude.

While thus occupied the door softly opened, and Herrera paused upon the threshold, gazing at his child. He waited till the prayer was done, his sunken eyes wet with emotion. Then, when he saw the glorious head sink slowly down upon the bosom, he knew that the murmur had ceased.

"Marie," he called, gently.

"Oh, my father!" She was by his side, with arms twined round his neck; and as she nestled there, he smoothed back the ringlets on his darling's head.

"You were praying for Seville and our darkened home?"

"Yes—and for Huo."

"Ah! poor Huo. He needs prayers from lips like yours. I fear much for his safety."

"Say not so, dear father. The God whom we adore will watch over him!"

"God is in heaven, child; but Satan stalks abroad to smite the flesh. Only the soul is safe for the garner of eternity."

"Nay, father, the Spirit of God must be everywhere, even in the black hour. Our lives are in His hands; our supplication for His mercy."

"Have you seen Huo of late?"

"No, father, he was forced to give out a false report of an intended journey. Huo St. Liege descends from the tribe of Gomeles. He is rich. And all who represent those cavaliers who won laurels for Castile are now persecuted of our race. But I feel that he is near and in disguise."

"Yet you have no word from him?"

"No," mournfully.

"Heaven forbid that his absence should be caused by any wicked act of Corinne Bonville's."

"Ah! Corinne!" and as she breathed the name a shudder shook her.

"How much have we cause to dread her."

"Yes," lowly.

"And she is merciless. My child, you do love Huo St. Liege?"

"He is my light, my happiness! You and he are the only ties binding me to this cruel earth."

"Would you make a sacrifice for his sake?"

"My very life," was the fervent answer.

"Then, listen. You know that I approve wholly of your troth with Huo. For Huo has been to me what a good son would be—"

"Oh, but he is worthy!"

"Patience. We know that his family and that of the Frenchwoman, Corinne Bonville, sealed a compact, when the two were infants, agreeing to unite them in marriage when they came of proper age."

"And was it not both an unrighteous and unbending covenant, dear father?" questioned Marie.

"Even so. But, singularly enough, while Huo

very justly refuses to comply with such a distasteful contract, she, with passions most terrible, would hold him to the unnatural bond. Jealousy of you is the sole cause of this—nothing else, for she is incapable of honorable affection."

"Well, father?"

"My darling child, if you knew that, by relinquishing Huo, you might preserve his life from the vengeance of this woman and bring peace to yourself, you would be willing to do so?"

"Relinquish Huo St. Liege!" burst from the startled maiden. "Oh, my father! How can you try me thus? Huo has given himself to me. He is mine—all mine! He laid his heart at my feet, to raise, make happy, or trample upon. How could I spurn him then?—how send him from me now?—I, who have loved him so long! Our troth is recorded in heaven. Better to die together, and reunite where the stings of enemies cannot enter, than to live on in a world made dreary by separation. No—no—I cannot give him up!"

Herrera was silent and thoughtful. Then he said:

"There is still another chance. And if successful, may the recording angel smite the lie I have uttered this day."

"Lie, father!"

"Ay; through my solicitude for you and Huo St. Liege, I have this day denounced Corinne Bonville, to the governor, as a witch!"

CHAPTER XI.

STORY OF THE APOTHECARY (CONTINUED).

AT the announcement from her father—that he had reported Corinne Bonville to the governor as a witch—Marie de Herrera quivered with a nameless chill.

"The act may bring me into fatal prominence," he added. "In seeking to destroy her, for your and Huo's good, I may pay with my own life."

The beauteous form slipped from his arms and sunk to the floor. Her bare, white arms outstretched, the angelic face turned upward, and tears—priceless tears—trickled down upon the pallid cheeks.

"Oh, thou merciful God! God of love and mercy!" she wailed. "Lift us from this curse of curses, where we can only live by the destruction of other lives! Give back to us the quietness and peace of parted days!—even the rest that infidels and idolaters, less deserving than we, could boast of! Save us from this bloody ordeal which besets a Christian faith; sow Thy majesty amid the people! Save us! Save us from such infamies as these, and confound the perpetrators of our misery!"

Herrera glanced uneasily about him. His daughter's words—the outburst of a true but desolate spirit—appeared to rouse a terror in his aged frame.

"Marie! Marie!" he cried, in a startled whisper.

She seemed not to hear him. Her form, in that supplicating posture was rigid as marble. Verily, a statue of distress.

"Marie!" and his lips pressed close to her ear—"Marie, are you mad? What are you saying so loud? That is the language of those philosophers of the North, whose advocates blister in the vengeance of the Inquisition. If that prayer was known to his eminence you would be dragged to the next *auto da fe*!"

While he spoke she was quivering from head to foot with emotions difficult to describe. The next moment he grasped her in his arms and bore her to a couch; for her life seemed to flutter out in one long, overpowering sigh.

"Marie! My child—my all! Speak to me! You are cold—dying! Open your eyes, Marie!"

"Oh! I am sick at heart," she moaned.

"What is to be done? You are ill; there is no one to call. We are alone, exiled, as it were, in this great house. Even Yva, your maid, was ordered home by her father, lest she should learn too much under your tuition—"

"Nay, you are uselessly anxious, dear father. Leave me. I am only weak. Let me rest—and pray for you, Huo and Seville. It is nothing. I shall be strong again soon."

De Herrera withdrew softly. At the door he paused and gave one look of deep, deep affection to his child.

As he walked along the broad hall he cast his eyes into a side room, or doorless alcove, where paints, palettes and brushes lay strewn in confusion, and on an easel a half-finished picture. It was Marie's studio; a snug retreat where she was wont to study the works of the masters and cultivate her own ambition to excel. But the brushes had stiffened in neglect, the paints were dry and hard, for it had been long since her fair hand plied the colors for her artist's dreams.

Marie lay still as death, her white hands clasped over her bosom and eyelids closed.

It was not singly of Huo she thought, nor of Corinne Bonville, her relentless enemy. Such as she were not left to obscurity in those strange days; her beauty was the topic of many a lustful lip, and eyes had spied upon her with the vigilance of vultures. She was not insensible

to this fact. Her spirit shrunk from horrors more manifold than the threats of Corinne.

Frightened by the people with whom she had once mingled, she retired, like a nun to her cell, into that lonely chamber, to commune with her God, only asking that she might continue her life in such seclusion and possess the love of Huo St. Liege.

How little she imagined the near proximity of another ordeal. A keen dread disturbed her at recollection of admirers and flatterers now instated in almost limitless power as a result of their zeal to serve the Inquisition; keener than the nightmare of Corinne, whose hate had grown Satanic.

Marie had been reared most strictly. But, since the red Tribunal exacted so much—even beyond the possibilities of nature—her tender philosophies revolted. And, although her shrine was the altar of her education, she frequently knelt there and offered those petitions to Heaven for sustaining strength in such language that, had they been heard and repeated to the Grand Inquisitor, would have doomed her to a dungeon.

Silence most profound settled in the chamber after the departure of Manuel de Herrera. The flame of the silver lamp burned on, but the eyes of the maiden remained shut. She lay still as death, locked in a repose that, by its interposition, brought sweet oblivion.

Presently something struck the curtains that waved before the balcony—something that hurtled across the room and struck and extinguished the lamp.

Then darkness and deeper silence reigned.

The missile was a stone. Around the stone was a silken cord, and attached to the cord, a scrap of white parchment.

Had she been awake to receive this singular messenger!

It was a warning, worded thus:

"MARIE DE HERRERA—Be vigilant. The eyes of foes are upon you. Be watchful this night, or you may wish for death before God needs you!"

There it lay, its mission lost.

"Oh, Huo!—Huo St. Liege! Will you come to me no more? Where shall I seek for you in this fateful labyrinth?" murmured the unconscious sleeper.

As the light went out in Marie's room a shadow emerged from a small grove to the right of the court. A square, black, box-like vehicle drawn by two jet-colored horses. A man sat on top, driving, and two men walked alongside. But there was no sound from foot, hoof or wheels; all were wrapped in cloths that deadened every movement. It was like a spectral mirage. One of those booted concerns in use with the sbires of the Inquisition when persons were to be captured noiselessly at the dead hour of night.

This vehicle moved close to the court and paused. The two who walked glided on to the mansion. One of these scaled the side of the building, climbing with the agility of a monkey, holding and footing by turns, on the cornice of a window or the looping tendril of a stout vine.

He reached the balcony, peered in between the curtains, then made a silent signal to the one below. Catching a ball of cord that was tossed to him, he drew up a long rope ladder which he strongly fastened to the balcony. Then, on tiptoe, he stole into the sacred chamber of purity.

Toll! Toll! Toll!

It was striking the hour before midnight.

Enriquez sped onward through the night, in the direction indicated by the strange and friendly figure. At the end of the ward Triana he reached the palace of the Gardunas—a massive, yet dilapidated stone structure bearing no evidence of life whatever. He might have remained in ignorance, had he not been attracted by a group of three stealthily passing through a suspicious gateway.

At a venture he joined this group, falling in behind; but, nearing the gate-tender, he was halted abruptly.

"Hold, cavalier! You have no business hereabout."

"And how do you know that?"

"No matter," said the man, preparing to slam the gate.

"Stay, my friend—see this," urged Enriquez, showing the talismanic ring.

"How came you by that?"

"It is now my turn to say, 'no matter.' I have business with Mandamiento."

"Come in then, quickly."

Enriquez entered a dismal stone hall beyond the gate—to one side of the hall a narrow passage, and at the end of this passage the gate-tender ushered him into the council-chamber of the Garduna.

A broad, square, colonnaded apartment or auditorium, lighted by a score of flaring torches.

Guapos, coberteras, serenas, all the various artists and adepts of the weird order were represented. A strange, significant assembly which convened regularly every night.

The center of the scene was a man of gigantic stature and villainous countenance. He had the eyes of an eagle, with the stare of a basilisk.

His suit was brown and red; short trowsers with bow-gartered stockings; a high broad-brimmed hat; a light cloak; a gaudy sash at the waist, in which was sheathed the deadly *albacete*. This was Mandamiento, the Master of the Order. He surveyed his flock with tigerish affection, grinning and stroking his long mustache.

"My children," said he, "I have nothing of importance to communicate to you, save one loss to our order by a *somerset*, (hanging,) and one enlisted in the *royal marine* (galleys.) This since last we met. And now, with admonition to remember how necessary it is to maintain utmost harmony in the brotherhood, I am ready to hear your reports."

"I have performed my task of baptisms (stabs)," said one.

"I have given the bath (drowning) to my man," said another.

"And I," declared a third, "have been faithful to the plot of *extinction* (assassination) on the route to Granada."

And so on, until nearly all had rendered reports satisfactory to the fearful code, pledges and bargains of the order.

"Right, my children; the seals and rewards were well earned. Do not forget the statue."

The hall of the Garduna contained a marble statue. At the front of this image was a chest, in which every Gardunian was expected to deposit a portion of his or her earnings. To this Mandamiento alluded.

Then followed an allotment of equally barbarous tasks; and when this was concluded Mandamiento folded his arms in silence, ready to hear whatever miscellaneous reports or complaints existed among his wild congregation.

"Master," called out the gate-tender, "here is one who seeks you, favored by the signet of our best *bravo*, Joachim. Its mission being now fulfilled, I return it to you." And, snatching the ring from the comer's finger, he tossed it to Mandamiento.

At sight of the stranger in their midst all had gripped their daggers.

"Come forward," said the wolfish Master. "We are ever ready to receive customers. How can the Garduna serve you?"

"A woman, whose name is Corinne—" began Enriquez.

"We know of her," interrupted Mandamiento.

"—In their infancy, she and Huo St. Liege—"

"We know of him also," again broke in the Master of the Garduna.

"—They were betrothed by their parents. Grown to maturity, St. Liege despises her; she loves him madly. He is betrothed to Marie, daughter of Manuel de Herrera—"

"We know of Marie de Herrera."

"—Corinne hates her rival. She has bribed a certain Miguel—"

"We have heard of the rascal Miguel. He is not one of us."

"—To abduct Marie this very night. Once in the power of Corinne, Marie need expect no mercy."

"Our sympathy goes to the unfortunate Marie," grinned the man-tiger.

"She must be saved. Miguel must not perpetrate the abduction."

"This is our task—an easy one. And afterward?"

"Fifty reals," replied Enriquez. "More: when Huo St. Liege knows of the service you have done him, he will treble the sum."

"Enough. Two good *bravos* will be near the house in half an hour. What else, now?"

"Nothing."

At a sign from Mandamiento, the gate-tender led their customer away. Enriquez was overjoyed with this success.

Enriquez had once been a secretary to Manuel de Herrera, who raised the Andalusian from absolute poverty to a most agreeable condition in life. When De Herrera was withdrawn from the Council, Enriquez was discharged, leaving his noble employer with many regrets and loaded with presents. Yva, the daughter of the tavern-keeper, had long been an attendant upon the old counselor's daughter, and she and Enriquez mutually learned to love under the roof of a kind master and mistress. Certain rumors pointing to the home of De Herrera as a nest of heresy had caused Yva's father to call her from her pleasant and exalting manner of life and place her in a grade quite unsuited to the tastes she had imbibed through association with her gentle young mistress. Hence the ardor of the two in behalf of Marie de Herrera; for they well knew of the deep hate of Corinne Bonville, and had lately discovered the latter's plans for a jealous vengeance.

Enriquez left the hall of the Garduna with buoyant step. He felt assured that Mandamiento would dispatch his *bravos* immediately, and Marie would be saved.

His course soon turned toward the mansion. He knew the room occupied by Marie, and an idea possessed him as he drew nigh.

In the mellow moonlight, he scribbled a few lines on a piece of parchment. Tying this to a pebble, he hurled it up and in at the window. As he saw the lamp go out, he thought:

"Ah! I have put out the light. The occurrence will be sure to attract her attention."

It was Enriquez who sent the mysterious warning, and all unconscious of its failure—unaware, too, of those shadows in the adjacent grove—he continued on his way.

Scarce twenty minutes elapsed—and while the ruffian who had ascended to the balcony still lingered in Marie's room—when two forms appeared suddenly at an angle of the building. They were the prompt agents of the Garduna.

"See," said one, pointing to the rogue who waited under the balcony, "we are just in time. He has a ladder already hung."

"Let us *extinguish* him at once!" growled the other.

Drawing their three-edged rapiers, they dashed forward. Their intended victim was taken at a disadvantage, but, being well armed and courageous, he met their assault valorously.

"Not so easy as you thought, assassins!" he cried, whirling his sword to a guard.

Then the steel blades met and flashed in the moonlight, darting and coiling like shining snakes. The *guapos* had no easy task, for the supple villain possessed a marvelous skill; and his wrist, like the blade he wielded, was excellently steeled.

At the first sound of conflict, the vehicle that stood in waiting wheeled and dashed for the shadows of the grove.

"Wait here," commanded a female voice from the inside. "There is only one below. Miguel must be in the room."

The struggle ended. There was a simultaneous lunge made by both assailants, followed by a groan of pain. The two *bravos* having accomplished their work—as they supposed—immediately disappeared, leaving a dead man on the sward.

Presently a figure emerged upon the balcony. A man who was burdened with a white, helpless form carefully descended the rope-ladder. The booted carriage came forward to meet him.

"Miguel," spoke the female voice, "you are exceedingly cunning. We have the prize, notwithstanding the interference of those fellows."

"True. But they have killed my comrade," grumbled the ruffian.

"Mind it not. A hundred reals more will console you for that."

The scoundrel placed his burden inside; the vehicle drove noiselessly off.

Almost in the same moment another actor came upon the scene. A man stepped leisurely round the corner nearest the balcony. A guitar was strapped from shoulder to waist, and he thrummed the instrument to a soft serenade. While he sung, he was thinking:

"She will know the voice and the song. It is no common serenader who comes to-night, sweet Marie."

But his fingers rested motionless on the strings. He saw the rope-ladder dangling from the balcony and the corpse upon the sward. Next he caught a glimpse of the receding carriage. The explanation—clear to him—was overwhelming. Casting aside the guitar and drawing his rapier, he sprung forward in pursuit.

"Treachery! Murder!" he exclaimed, straining to his utmost. "Oh! Marie! Marie! I know that you are in the power of Corinne!"

About the residence of Corinne Bonville, the Frenchwoman, all was solemnly hushed and dark with the shadows of trees. But its walls inclosed a frightful scene.

In one apartment a large lamp burned, forming goblin shapes within the folds of surrounding drapery. A small charcoal furnace was at full fire on a stone hearth, and kneeling before this was Corinne, her great black eyes glowing like the coals she watched so intently.

Under ordinary circumstances Corinne would have been a very beautiful woman. Now there was a most diabolical expression in her face, a look so malignant that the beholder might shudder at thought of some hideous purpose thus transforming her.

She held one end of a long iron—the other end being buried in the fire—and anon glanced at a couch near by.

On the couch lay Marie de Herrera. At this moment, recovering from an overpowering drug, she raised to one elbow and regarded her enemy with bewilderment, as if in some terrible nightmare.

"Where am I? What place is this? Ah—Corinne!"

"Ay, Marie de Herrera," said the Frenchwoman, maliciously, "this is to be your torture-chamber! How would your lover feel to know that you are so completely in my grasp? Ha! ha! ha!"

The doors had been carefully secured. There was no chance of egress save by the window, and Corinne was between that and her rival. Truly, in the fiend-woman's power.

"What do you intend to do?" she asked, shuddering.

"What?" was the shrill answering cry. "Not kill you—that would be poor revenge. I have lost my earth's idol, the only man of my heart. Your pretty face was the thief. Look at this iron!—I shall burn out your eyes! Huo St.

Liege will shrink in loathing from you! Then I will have my revenge. Come—prepare!"

The iron was now red-hot. Flourishing it aloft, the she-demon advanced upon her intended prey.

"Corinne! Corinne! Do not, for the love of Heaven, attempt so cruel a deed. You are stronger than I. Have mercy, Corinne!"

"Huo dotes on that face. Aha! I shall make it a very fright to see!"

"Beware," gasped Marie. "Beware the smiting hand of God! Stand back, Corinne; you shall not!"

The Frenchwoman became infuriate. With a nimble movement she seized the long hair of her rival and at one powerful wrench dragged her to her knees upon the floor.

A wild cry of despair broke from Marie's lips, for the hot breath of the iron was even then scorching her cheek.

But Heaven forbade a scene so devilish. There was a loud crash; the glass of the window went shivering into a myriad atoms on the floor. Huo St. Liege knocked the iron brand aside, and gathered his loved one safely to his breast.

"Corinne, thou foul sorceress!" he cried. "The shape of the devil is in you!"

Ere she could reply, to vent her fury at this timely interruption, there sounded a loud, imperative summons at the door.

Rap! Rap! Rap! the thumping of armored knuckles.

The tableau rested in silence.

"Open!" commanded a hoarse voice. "Open, in the name of the Inquisition!" Again the knuckles rapped.

There was reveling in the gardens of the Inquisitorial Palace.

Beyond the bloom of the garden, past the scented lawns, under the rustling trees, there was an illuminated pavilion, half-hidden behind a screen of fragrant verdure.

This pavilion was fitted out gorgeously in furnishings, statuary, paintings, and in the center a long table, spread with bounteous viands and wines of Malaga.

The Grand Inquisitor sat at the head of a merry company.

"And so," said one, "my lord has received information of Corinne."

"You have her name put as that of a sweetheart," observed another.

"I have never even seen her," the first hastened to avow. "It is said that she feeds on *melopia* of Satan."

"I thought I heard the name of Corinne mentioned," remarked the Grand Inquisitor, casting his eyes searchingly about.

"We heard that she had been denounced as a witch."

"The report is true."

"But," joined in the Bishop of Malaga, "who has taken so much pains to inform against her?"

"Manuel de Herrera," was the quiet reply.

"The old counselor!" exclaimed several.

"Then it must be so."

"Is Manuel de Herrera, then, so immaculate?"

"Why, your eminence, I—we—that is—"

"I have heard it whispered," said the Grand Inquisitor, with a cold glitter in his eyes and a shuddering accent of calmness to his voice, "that the home of De Herrera held strange habits of religion and secrets of living that the world ought to know."

"Oh!" was the general (and embarrassed expression at this.

"A poor tavern-keeper saw fit to withdraw his daughter from service in that mansion, because of dangerous lessons imbibed."

"Oh!" they uttered again.

"Therefore, while the Inquisition deems it a duty to ascertain the true character of Corinne Bonville, it is also constrained to set spies upon the person of the informer, Manuel de Herrera."

"Very proper," agreed all.

"Further," went on the Grand Inquisitor, "if the life of De Herrera should fall sacrifice as the penalty of some possible folly, it will leave his child, Marie, who is beautiful as yonder picture"—pointing to a picture of the nude Clytia disporting herself in a bed of flowers—"without guard or guidance. In which event, it would be quite proper that the Inquisition should extend its protection to the child, and, in her inexperience, direct the doubloons of her father."

Here the screen at the end of the banqueting-hall was pushed aside, and a *familiar*, accompanied by a hooded squire, came into their midst.

"My lord," said the *familiar*, "we await your order to set out upon the errand concerning Corinne Bonville."

"Beppo," whispered his eminence, "when you have secured Corinne go to the mansion of Manuel de Herrera. It is understood that Huo St. Liege—who is still in Seville and in disguise notwithstanding the report of his absence—will serenade there to-night. Huo St. Liege is wanted by the Inquisition, Beppo."

"Yes, my lord."

"Manuel de Herrera will be wanted soon, also."

"Yes."

"And if you can secure the person of Marie, his daughter, see that she is afforded ample protection by allotting to her an apartment in the palace. You understand me, Beppo?"

"Perfectly, my lord."

"Then make haste with all you have to do. If successful in all, this purse; besides, vast indulgence from our good Archbishop of Toledo." The familiar and the squire departed.

The Grand Inquisitor leaned over to whisper in the ear of a young and wealthy duke who was present disguised as a monk.

"With Huo St. Liege removed, Cuerpo of Toledo, your wooing of Marie de Herrera may have a greater chance for prosperity."

The rapping on the door of Corinne's house continued. Its suddenness and spiteful sharpness startled the three occupants of the room.

"Open this door in the name of the Inquisition!"

Huo roused with a start as if smitten by a battery.

"Quick, Marie—this way! The Inquisition has sent for Corinne; and for us to be found here would be death!"

Grasping her by the wrist he ran toward the shattered window. Here two spectral figures confronted him. One of these he felled by a lightning stroke of his fist—the other grappled with him and a fearful struggle ensued.

Corinne was pale as a corpse, and, still holding in one hand the red-hot iron, she moved hurriedly to the door. She did not dare disobey that summons.

"Fly, Marie!—fly!" panted Huo, as he found himself engaged with an antagonist of unusual muscle.

Uttering a prayer for the safety of her lover, she slipped through the window, leaped from the low balcony to the sward, and darted away into the night.

Blindly she fled, with but a single impulse; to escape the vicinity of her fortunate delivery from the vengeful purpose of Corinne.

Not for one moment did she doubt the ability of her lover to overcome his shadowy adversary; and feeling confident that Huo would soon be hot-foot upon her trail, she slackened her pace after going some distance, and finally paused to wait within a clump of shrubbery.

But the expected footfall came not. Silence like the tomb was around her, and as the moments passed she trembled with sad misgivings. At the expiration of half an hour the suspense grew unbearable. Flitting like a phantom amid the shadows she retraced her steps. When she reached the house it was dark, still and deserted.

"Huo! Huo! Where are you?" she called, tremulously.

But there was no response.

Like a frightened fawn she sped away again. She ran in the direction of her home, her brain nigh crazed with the conviction that harm had come to Huo St. Liege.

"One o'clock!" cried the watchman.

She paid no heed: speeding onward, onward. As she neared the mansion a form stepped across her path.

"Marie de Herrera!"

"Enriquez!—you?"

"Ay; and thank the providence of Heaven I am here to warn you!"

"'Tis too late. I have just escaped from Corinne, who, but for the arrival of Huo, would have branded me with fire. And as I left, the officers of the Inquisition were clamoring at the door. Huo was in combat with one of them. Oh! good Enriquez, what troubles have been mine this night. Let me hasten to my father."

"Can it, indeed, be possible that the Garduna failed?" Then aloud: "Marie de Herrera, do not go near that house. Your father is at this very moment under the surveillance of the Inquisition."

"Oh, Heaven!" gasped Marie, clasping her hands over her throbbing heart, "it has come at last! So soon!"

"To go there now would be to compass your own ruin. Cuerpo of Toledo has secured the co-operation of the Grand Inquisitor, in his base designs upon your person."

"Oh, my poor father!" she moaned, in a spirit of agony. "No—no—let me fly to him. We will fall together!"

"But," urged Enriquez, "have you forgotten that you belong to Huo St. Liege?"

"Where shall I go?" she asked, in despair.

"To my own humble mother and sister, if you will."

"Then lead me; for I have faith in you—and I am walking in the dark."

"You could not commit yourself to one more devoted to your interests. Come."

But, meantime, what of Huo St. Liege?

CHAPTER XII.

STORY OF THE APOTHECARY—(CONCLUDED.)

WHILE Huo St. Liege struggled with the hooded squire who disputed his progress, Corinne had thrown open the door, admitting the emissaries of the dread tribunal.

They filed in, in long gowns, cone-shaped caps, and fierce eyes gleaming from the eyelets of

their masks. At a glance, they comprehended the meaning of that desperate conflict by the window, and while Huo was on the point of throttling his antagonist, he was seized from behind and dragged backward by powerful arms.

"Ah!" cried one. "It is Huo St. Liege! The very man we want!"

"And what do you want of me?" fearlessly demanded the prisoner.

The leader of the sbires addressed Corinne: "Come, Corinne, the Inquisition wants you, also."

"Me!" she screamed. "Wants me! No—no! I have done nothing!" and fell on her knees, clasping her hands outstretched in an attitude of terror.

"Sorceress!" exclaimed Huo. "You are overtaken in your iniquity!"

"What has she been doing, to your knowledge?" interrogated the deep-voiced figure.

"Mark that she has cast an iron brand upon the hearth," answered the young man, quickly.

"I entered here a few moments since, in time to prevent her burning out the eyes of Marie de Herrera!"

"Marie de Herrera!" repeated the leader, peculiarly. "Where is she now?"

"That is for you to discover."

"Come with us, Corinne; for thou art indeed a witch!"

"Mercy! I am no witch!" shrieked the miserable woman.

As well appeal to stone images. Her wails and groanings were lost upon men who knew no law but the demands of the Inquisition. They dragged her forth to the hearse-like vehicle in waiting.

"At last we are to die together! That will be some satisfaction to me!" she hissed into Huo's ear.

He walked bravely out between his captors.

The hours passed on. Toward daylight people discovered a rank smell of smoke in the neighborhood of Corinne's house. While wondering as to its cause, thick volumes of flame burst from the windows. The building had caught fire from the iron brand which the woman had cast recklessly aside upon the announcement of her arrest.

Agreeably to hints which Beppo, captain of the sbires, had received from the Grand Inquisitor, that grim personage called next morning at the mansion of Manuel de Herrera.

On the outside he was met by one of his zealous spies who had been near the mansion since shortly after midnight.

Enriquez had discovered this spy, and, as has been shown, suspecting the connivance of the Inquisition, he was providentially enabled to warn Marie and prevent her stepping into a net which, he rightly guessed, was intended for both father and daughter.

Cuerpo of Toledo, mentioned as sitting at the right hand of the Grand Inquisitor, in the pavilion, had been a suitor for Manuel de Herrera's lovely child. Being notorious for a dissipated character and brutal temper it was no wonder that Marie shrunk from his acquaintance with repugnance. Far from relinquishing his designs upon the pure girl—and stimulated by an intense hate for his successful rival, Huo St. Liege—Cuerpo had induced the Grand Inquisitor to join in a league to destroy the old counselor and make away with his coveted child.

As the spy approached, Beppo accosted him.

"Well, what have you now?"

"There has been a murder done."

"Ha! A murder, say you?"

"Step this way." And the spy led him to the rear, showing the dead man on the sward and the rope-ladder dangling from the balcony.

"Oh! How long do you suppose this has been lying here?" indicating the body.

"I found it when I first came."

"Give it a burial while I make inquiries about it." With this order, Beppo proceeded to climb the ladder.

Reaching the room above, he discovered Manuel de Herrera lying, prone upon his face, and grasping rigidly in one hand a piece of parchment.

Beppo took the parchment from the clinched fist and read it. It was the warning that Enriquez had cast in the night gone. Then he placed his fingers on the wrist of the prostrate man.

"Dead!" he mumbled. "His daughter has been stolen; the shock was too great."

The spy was busy below with the corpse when Beppo rejoined him.

"Finish your task," he said, striding hurriedly away. "I have important news to communicate to his eminence."

Manuel de Herrera had escaped the summons of the Inquisition. His wealth of money and property, however, did not escape.

After a rigorous but fruitless search for Marie—in which none were more ardent than Cuerpo of Toledo—the Inquisition appropriated everything belonging to the old man. The Governor of Seville issued a proclamation offering Marie de Herrera ten days in which to present herself and receive that portion of her fa-

ther's estate not considered subject as tribute to the rulers of Seville. This Governor was acting under private instructions meant to lure Marie into the power of her enemies. But the object of the proclamation was frustrated.

Safe in the home of Enriquez, whose mother and sister lovingly consoled with her, Marie was kept informed of all that transpired outside. She heard the story of the confiscation calmly, seeming to forget it in the balance with other woes.

On two occasions her enemy had passed the house; once, happening to glance up at the windows, Marie, who was standing there pale and frozen at sight of him, was only saved from recognition by the quick wit of Enriquez's mother, who threw her arms around the neck of her charge and bent to kiss her, thus screening her face.

Enriquez was absent continuously during the days of Marie's hiding. When he joined them after each nightfall his brow was gloomy and thoughtful.

Marie observed the shadow that had settled upon him—noticed that he grew more morose each day. At last, being an unintentional listener to some words addressed by her protector to his mother, the truth flashed upon her, and she burst in upon them, crying, distressedly:

"Oh, Enriquez! I know the secret, now, of your strange moods. Tell me: where is Huo?—that you are so anxious about him."

It had to be told. Concealment was no longer possible. A few syllables conveyed the sad intelligence of Huo's imprisonment; and thus blow after blow fell upon her, as if, indeed, Heaven itself had at last deserted her.

Upon a certain evening—the fourth day following that proclamation which was intended to entrap her—a new spirit seemed to possess the maiden. Her white cheeks changed to a fevered flush, and a sparkle as of old came back to the lustrous eyes. Her poise was firm, her step elastic, and a hard compression of the lips indicated that some great purpose was born within her.

"My only friend," she said, to Enriquez. "God has given me an inspiration. I feel that I can remain no longer idle here. I have a precious life to save. Huo St. Liege must be snatched from the Inquisition."

"But—how?" He regarded her in surprise.

"Oh, I have a plan!"

"You! And what can you do?—who are also threatened with so much."

"You will aid me, if I show you how it can be done at one bold stroke?"

"Ay, with whole soul and muscle."

"Then, good Enriquez, you must procure for me the guise of a Dominican. I am about to leave Seville—going to the throne!"

"To Charles V.!" he exclaimed. "Ah! poor girl, you do not know him. Even did you succeed in obtaining a note of intercession for Huo St. Liege, the monarch would dispatch an extra courier countermanding it. He has a wholesome fear of the Inquisition. I see your plan; it will be of no use."

"But you do not see at all. I will plead on my knees, with tears and prayers, for royal intercession; and mayhap I may reach Seville in advance of any other message, for I will be courier myself! In my absence you have your part to perform. Is there not money enough between us to invite the co-operation of the Garduna?"

"So, you have heard of the Garduna?"

"Who in this city has not? Now, give ear for a moment, good Enriquez, while I confide my plans to you."

Drawing closer to Enriquez, she continued, in an undertone, to unfold the scheme of her brain for the rescue of Huo St. Liege.

What cannot a woman plot!—how cunningly, to rescue a lover from the circle of his foes!

As Enriquez listened, his face brightened. When she had finished a simple detail, he stepped back and surveyed her with admiration.

"Good! Good!" he broke forth, clapping his hands. "Verily, you are an apt plotter in a noble cause. I see. It is feasible. Huo St. Liege may yet be saved. When will you go?"

"This very night."

"So be it. I will procure the disguise. Nobody will suspect Marie de Herrera when looking at the smooth-faced Dominican."

Huo St. Liege, heavily manacled, lay in his dungeon.

His prospects were dismal enough. That his body was to be sacrificed he had no doubt. The approach of death alone did not alarm him; he was prepared, he believed, to meet his Maker and Judge. But, to be cut off in the prime of manhood, when so much of happiness promised; to realize that Marie, unprotected, must soon fall a prey to ruthless villainy—this was the keen bitterness that lurked in his unfortunate fate.

The ten days had elapsed. The Governor reported his failure to the General Inquisitor, who, enraged at being baffled, set afoot such a system of spies that, had his prey been hiding in a kennel, she would have been unearthed.

Fortunately for Marie, she was then far from Seville; and had it not been that the duty of her

mission compelled a return, her disappearance might have forever remained a mystery.

The trial (9) came. A day as sullen in aspect as the tribunal before which the cavalier was to be tried.

St. Liege, guarded on either side by armed sbires, was conducted into the hall. The Grand Inquisitor was seated in his presidential chair, with a face as stern as he might without betraying his natural malignance.

Several were there, being tried by turns and—condemned.

Huo was led forward to the semicircular table, where he was left standing before a volume of the Gospel and a sable crucifix.

There was an audience of monks and noblemen. The young man was well known, and many there were pained at surmising what was in store for him, though none were brave enough to evince sympathy for the declared culprit.

"Huo St. Liege, swear to speak the truth."

"I swear."

"You are accused," continued the inquisitor, "of having failed to denounce Manuel de Herrera, and of encouraging Marie, his child, in sacrilegious doctrines."

"My lord, as to the first, I do not understand you. As to the last, I pronounce it a lie!"

The Grand Inquisitor started as if stung. A murmur passed among the audience. Never had culprit dared to utter such a bold retort.

"He denies it"—nodding to the secretaries.

"Finish this mockery briefly!" exclaimed Huo. "I know that my death is decided upon. Why waste time in such blasphemous mumery?"

Here a sbire announced:

"Your eminence, a courier from the king, on business relating to Huo St. Liege."

"Admit him," complacently.

This courier, whose sudden arrival gave new interest to Huo's case, was ushered in. A slight, even girlish figure. He wore a gay jacket and leggings, and short, crisp curls clustered over the pure brow. Skin like the brown olive, eyes of hazel, lips uncommon rich for a boy, and shape of faultless symmetry. Kneeling and doffing his velvet cap till the gaudy plume swept the floor, he waited to be addressed.

"Rise," said his eminence, regarding the youth with a look of strange perplexity. "We are always honored by receipt of any communication from King Charles. What is the nature of the mission?"

The courier made a sign, indicating that he was a mute, and presented a letter from Charles V., bearing the royal seal.

"As I live!" thought the Inquisitor, "I have penetrated the disguise of this masquerading courier. Not all the dyes and furbelows in Spain can hide from my eyes the loveliness of Marie de Herrera! She has been to the king in behalf of her lover. We shall soon know."

Breaking the royal seal, he began reading the missive of vellum. The eyes of the Grand Inquisitor had been sharper than those of the lover.

This was the substance of the royal communication:

"PALACE OF MADRID, }
May —, 1534. }

"To His Eminence the Grand Inquisitor—Greeting:

"Huo St. Liege, descendant of a worthy counselor of Castile, and whose line under Philip II. were most loyal subjects to both crown and church, is now a prisoner of your office.

"As it is believed that the young man is of special service to us, and not an enemy, it is our earnest desire that he be acquitted by the tribunal of which your eminence is chief.

CHARLES."

This was a brave epistle. It required great courage to interfere with the Inquisition. King Charles entertained a proportionate fear of the powerful institution which, he knew well, at that time held the whole domain under its iron heel. But history tells that he was a man of genius and intrepidity, and once his sympathies aroused, he would dare dangerous things in a worthy cause, placing both person and throne in peril.

The Grand Inquisitor read the letter with evident displeasure. When he looked up the courier had vanished. Hastily summoning a sbire to his side, he whispered:

"Watch every egress. Set guards everywhere. That messenger must not escape from the palace. When he is caught, advise me."

"My lord! The courier of the king—"

"Pah! Do as I bid you."

Huo St. Liege was led back to his dungeon.

"My lord," said a familiar, as his eminence descended from the presidential chair, "the Master of the Garduna seeks a private audience."

"I will see him. I cannot afford to slight the crazy fellow, or his Order may combine against me, and those *guapos* are assassins of rare frenzy. Show him in."

The Inquisitor stepped behind the folds of a curtain, into a convenient alcove. Presently Mandamiento was ushered in.

He stood with folded arms, without removing his cone-shaped sombrero, in an attitude of conscious self-importance. His grotesque accouterments finished off with a long knife protruding from his belt; his mien so combinedly fancy

and ugly, placed the beholder in a quandary, whether to laugh or feel serious.

"Well, Mandamiento, what is your business?"

"For once," replied the Master, in a tone of ludicrous sorrow, "the brothers of the Garduna are unhappy."

"And what have I to do with it?"

"We have done many deeds for your eminence—receiving our pay with a clear conscience. I am come to ask a favor."

"Name it."

"Three weeks ago we received a sum of money to *extinguish* a certain man. The money was paid in good faith, and we promised to perform our task. But it has pleased the Inquisition to seize upon the one whose life, of right, belongs to us. We are, therefore, traitors to our promise."

"Who is this man?"

"Huo St. Liege."

"Ha!" As the Grand Inquisitor uttered the exclamation he took half a dozen quick strides across the alcove.

Mandamiento watched him with mournful eyes.

"Look you: if I turn this man over to you, what becomes of him?"

"He will be *extinguished* forthwith."

"Are you sure?"

"Can you doubt me?" reproachfully.

"Be it so. You shall have Huo St. Liege."

"Ah, but you remove a load from my breast. To-night, when the lamps are out, there will be a coach near the cathedral on square L'Esplanade. If he can be got into it he will not see the sun rise on Seville."

"I rely upon it, he will be there. But, stay; who was it that paid you to remove this young man?"

"Cuerpo of Toledo."

"That will do. You have my promise. Now, go."

Mandamiento strutted away with comical dignity. As he departed a spy entered with the announcement:

"My lord, the courier was seen to leave the palace, riding furiously, and was completely lost sight of."

"Beppo"—it was that personage—"the courier was no other than Marie de Herrera. Could you not penetrate the disguise?"

"Nay—I never dreamed it!"

"Where is Cuerpo of Toledo?"

"In his cups: or, as the vulgar say, 'quite drunk.'"

"Send out your best spies. Marie de Herrera is in Seville. If you fail to find her, I shall deem you and your officers a pack of asses. Go."

The Grand Inquisitor seated himself to address the following to Charles V.:

"PALACE OF THE INQUISITION, }
SEVILLE, May —, 1534. }

"It is regretted that your messenger did not arrive sooner. Huo St. Liege was honorably acquitted; but we understand that he fell into the hands of the Garduna—of whose atrocities you may have heard—and has disappeared entirely. It would have been our pleasure to give the unfortunate young man safe conduct from Seville."

ARBUES.

"To Charles, King of Spain."

Having sealed and dispatched this by special courier, he sunk back in his chair, laughing:

"There! Let us measure weapons, King Charles! Ha! ha! ha!"

Late that same evening the Grand Inquisitor walked in the palace gardens, soothing away his irritations of the day beneath the bathing moonlight and balmy odor of flowers. A favorite Dominican usually accompanied him in these nightly walks, but on this occasion he was alone.

Not long alone. The form of a man came rushing upon him, flourishing a piece of vellum. The voice of Cuerpo cried:

"My lord, have you turned blind fool at last?"

"Cuerpo of Toledo, explain yourself!" demanded the Inquisitor, sharply.

"You have given Huo St. Liege his liberty!"

"I!" in blank amazement.

"I never employed the Garduna in my life. This is some trick. You inform me that Marie de Herrera is in Seville. Well, perhaps he and she are in each other's arms. A trick, I say. You have been hoodwinked by the crafty Master of the Garduna!"

"Treachery!" hissed the Grand Inquisitor, clinching his fists in rage.

The next moment he had summoned a score of officers to whom he gave hurried instructions, sending them to square L'Esplanade.

But—too late!

A black-looking coach was standing near the cathedral, with the driver on top, ready to start upon an instant's warning. A little apart were two savage-looking *guapos*, with sable cloaks wound tight around their shoulders.

Soon a second coach appeared. Two sbires dismounted, dragging with them the form of a man pinioned and gagged.

The *guapos* advanced to the new-comers and asked:

"Is this the body we are looking for?"

"Yes, make short work of it."

The two laid hold upon the helpless prisoner and bore him to the waiting coach. Into this they thrust him, giving him, at the same time, several merciless cuffs, and banged the door shut. At a signal, the driver whipped his horses into a mad gallop.

"He is dead by this time," said one of the *guapos*, intending his words for the ears of the sbires who watched the fast-receding vehicle.

Imagine the surprise of the prisoner when, finding himself shut up in the coach and fully expecting death, a knife severed his bonds and a rapid hand took the gag from his mouth. A pair of arms wound round his neck and a sweet voice murmured:

"At last! At last! Huo!—my beloved!"

His senses reeled. Then he stretched forth his free arms and drew the precious form to his breast.

"Marie! I dream!" he exclaimed, brokenly. "To what miracle of Heaven do I owe this deliverance?"

"Saved by the woman you love, assisted by the Garduna!" spoke a third voice—Enriquez.

"And did not you aid, also?" reminded a fourth—Yva.

The letter from Charles V. was but part of the plan formed by the courageous maiden. Satisfied that the Grand Inquisitor was resolved upon the destruction of Huo St. Liege, and would readily avail himself of an opportunity to thwart the good purpose of the monarch, Mandamiento had been easily bribed to utter the falsehood which persuaded his eminence to give over Huo to the supposed vengeance of the Garduna.

Huo and Marie, accompanied by Enriquez and Yva, fled to Germany. Both pair, all warmly attached, were duly wedded.

Corinne Bonville, the Frenchwoman, perished in the dungeons of the Inquisition while undergoing extreme and most horrid tortures.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE VOICE OF SERGEANT KILLER.

WE now return to the characters of our story proper, making their way by that underground passage from Castle de Cosnac, under the Seine, toward the chapel a short distance from St. Genevieve.

By the time Paschal Broeck had concluded his narrative—given in language far different from what the reader has perused—they were moving amid the deep recesses and ghostly cells of the catacombs.

Perrue, the mulatto, had clasped his fingers around a cord which he picked up from the flinty floor, allowing it to slide through his hold as he walked; the string being a guide, without which they might have become hopelessly lost.

"Well, Paschal Broeck," said Latour, "we have listened attentively to your narrative. You have told us of a certain Huo St. Liege, his bride, Marie, and a Frenchwoman named Corinne Bonville, who was put to death by torture in the dungeons of the Inquisition. Now what has all this to do with your hate for Poilet St. Liege, the scoundrel who has dared to cast his evil eyes upon my dear Pearlina?"

They were in a cavernous chamber having several passages leading off from it. To one of these the guiding-cord stretched. But Perrue paused, as if awaiting further instructions from his master.

The apothecary halted and turned. He drew himself erect, extended his arms high and outward, till the sleeves of his gown drooped like two full-spread bat-wings. He clinched his effeminate fists, and his lean face assumed again that demoniacal expression which the others had before observed in the tapestried chamber.

"Blazes of flame!" he fairly snarled. "'The blood of Huo and Marie St. Liege flows in the veins of Poilet St. Liege! Corinne was descended from Castor Bonville. So am I. My true name is Hurol Bonville. When the Frenchwoman died her terrible death in the dungeon of the Inquisition, the surviving Bonvilles swore an oath of extermination against the male descendants of St. Liege—not against the females, for their names might be changed by marriage; and to wipe the name of St. Liege forever from the face of creation—or that portion of it handed down direct from the Spanish fugitives—was the object of the oath. For two centuries the daggers of Bonville and St. Liege have been dyed in the blood of their owners! Poilet St. Liege is the last male of that house. But for a St. Liege, Corinne would never have died in a dungeon! I have sworn to have the life of Poilet St. Liege! Ha! ha! Vendetta! Ha! ha!" And shaking from head to foot with consuming passion, Paschal Broeck abruptly resumed his walk, motioning Perrue to follow the cord. But he continued to mutter in an undertone: "I have said that Poilet St. Liege was the last—the last male, yes. But there is another of same blood who does not inherit the hated name. A female. For years I have hunted her trail, since losing sight of her mother in Germany. Let me find her, and more money flows into the coffers of Paschal Broeck!"

In a brief space the apothecary led them through a narrow aperture, and stopped within what was evidently a vault. Upon all sides

were those square, sealed plates, in tiers, denoting the concealment of coffins, and notwithstanding the strong seals, a nauseous odor of putrefied flesh filled the close atmosphere of the place.

At one side a short, narrow ladder leaned against the wall; at the top of the ladder a broad slab fitted to a supporting rim.

"We must be quick or this poisonous air will overpower us. Haste."

He ascended the ladder and pushed aside the slab.

"Let Mademoiselle Pearlina go first," he said, descending, "for the ladder will not permit two to pass at the same time."

Pearline obeyed, reaching and stepping out upon the chapel floor.

"Now, madame—you. Let me assist you with that casket. It appears to cumber you. When you are safely up, I may hand it to you."

In order to manage her skirts, and without thinking how unwise the act, she handed him the valuable casket and followed Pearlina.

The apothecary could hardly smother a shout of exultation as he wound one arm, like a coiling snake, round the coveted treasure.

"Now, Monsieur Latour—you."

But before Latour could place a foot upon the ladder, a startling thing occurred.

A bright glare of light poured down from the chapel above; two mingled and piercing shrieks rung in the ears of those below. And a loud, hoarse, savage voice roared:

"Oho! By the horns of the moon! we have them now! Down with that slab, or you will all be killed by the Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume! Make sure of these two!"

The slab was pushed into its place and a heavy weight rested upon it.

At the first intimation of discovery, the apothecary cried:

"Out with that light, Perrue! Blazes! we are trapped!" making signs to the deaf mute which meant the words he uttered.

He snatched the ladder away from the wall, and with it—and just as Perrue extinguished the two lamps—he vanished through the narrow aperture by which they had entered the vault.

"Thou devil-alchemist! Halt, there! Dog of a traitor!—where are you?" called Latour, standing alone and dismayed in the darkness.

The only answer was a dull trample and thud of feet overhead.

CHAPTER XIV.

IMPRISONMENT OF PEARLINE.

It was the intention of the bold and burly Sergeant Killer to capture simultaneously the whole party whom he expected to encounter at the chapel a short distance from St. Genevieve—being apt-witted enough to understand, or deduce, from what he saw in the tapestried chamber of the castle, that they would reach the chapel by means of some secret underground passage.

Hence his exclamation, deep in his bushy beard:

"Four necks for the guillotine, and promotion for John Killer! Thunders of luck!" etc.

As he galloped onward at the head of the small body of cavalry—where he was left at the conclusion of Chapter IX—he could not prevent his mind reviewing those signal events which occurred so recently at Castle de Cosnac, most prominent of all which was the terrible, death-dealing, invincible two-edged sword of Latour de Cosnac, the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume.

"I have here ten men," passed in his brain, as he glanced back at his mounted companions. "That masked knight of lightning and destruction will at least kill four ere we can capture him. That will leave four horses for the prisoners: Latour de Cosnac, madame, mademoiselle and, lastly, the death-faced apothecary who professes to hate my captain, Poilet St. Liege. I have ever held a grudge against Paschal Broeck, since he knocked me over by an electric shock in his foul-smelling store on Rue Vivienne. It is rumored that he keeps a pet boa-constrictor in his laboratory, imported from Guatemala. Ho! Jupiter! That snake will soon be left to starve to death; for I shall deprive it of its master and tender, the cursed apothecary!"

Arriving at the chapel and forcing an entrance, the sergeant distributed his ten men as judiciously as possible in the darkness of the interior, causing them to crouch here and there in the aisles, pews, and near the altar—vowing to shoot the first man who gaped, sneezed, clanked a scabbard or scraped a boot—and finally seated himself on one of the benches, grim and motionless.

Unbroken silence prevailed for a long while—the delay owing to the recital of the apothecary's story—and not a breath betrayed the presence of the ambushed soldiery: even the horses, picketed upon the sward at the side of the chapel, among the white grave-stones dozed without switching a tail.

At last the alert ears of John Killer detected a slight scratching noise close by, followed by the pushing aside of a slab in the pavement before the altar, and then a faint glimmer of light from the opening.

A female appeared, dimly outlined, but dis-

ting enough to show the face of Pearlina. Then another female, recognized as Madame la Baronne.

Sight of the two women standing thus alone, caused him to instantly alter his plans. Designing to capture these important persons without bloodshed—leaving De Cosnac and the apothecary till some future opportunity, because he knew that, above all, Captain St. Liege desired to possess the person of lovely Pearlina—he bounded from his seat on the bench, giving a signal which produced in an instant the brilliant light of four blazing torches, and bellowed forth those words which struck surprise and dismay to the heart of Latour:

"Oh! By the horns of the moon! we have them now! Down with that slab, or you will all be killed by the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume! Make sure of these two!"

Two troopers kicked the slab back into its place, standing upon it, their combined weight heavy enough to resist any effort to move it from below. Four others, rising from their concealment like uniformed and savage specters, rushed upon madame and Pearlina.

It was at this crisis, and during all—which transpired almost in the transit of a second of time—that the two captives uttered those terrified and despairing shrieks which told Latour and the apothecary that they were entrapped.

Madame, who, as before stated, was an invalid, could not survive so great and unexpected a shock, and fainted immediately. Pearlina struggled desperately, calling vainly to her lover, who, as the reader knows, was himself, just then, placed in a fearful predicament.

"Come, there, you beauty," growled the giant, advancing and squeezing the maiden's arm until she was agonized with pain, "if you do not stop this cat-scratching—by the horns of the moon! I shall put a gag in your mouth and a rope on your limbs. You are caught. Surrender. Ho! be reasonable, I say, and you may save us the trouble of hunting you. For—Jupiter—it would please me to be able to knock your brains out against that altar, in return for the impudence you gave me on the grand staircase!"

Perceiving how useless to resist, Pearlina yielded to the rough dragging grasp of her captors and was hurried from the chapel.

"Give the girl to me," ordered John Killer. "As for the other, one of us can toss her across a saddle-bow."

Having cast a pile of benches on the slab within the chapel, the cavalymen mounted and dashed briskly away.

"Halt!" commanded the sergeant, after a smart ride. "Turn that carcass—which is Madame Cosnac—over to the *conciergerie*. Two of you will accompany me with this body—which is Mademoiselle Pearlina—to the Luxembourg. Forward!"

"Oh! no—no!" screamed Pearlina. "Beast though you are, you would not so cruelly separate us! Let us at least be together—die together, I implore you!"

"Ough! Be still, you!" grunted John Killer, separating from the rest and trotting off, accompanied by two cavalymen.

"Oh, madame!" wailed the helpless Pearlina, straining her eyes after the departing troopers. "You who were always a sweet mother to me!—shall I never see you again?"

Unable longer to sustain herself, she sobbed aloud, the hot tears trickling down upon the coarse, dirty hands that wound their polluting embrace about her waist.

Madame did not hear. She was still in a deep swoon, and only recovered, finally, to find herself in one of the filthiest cells of the *conciergerie*.

Reaching the Luxembourg, Sergeant Killer himself carried his prisoner to one of the rooms which the Revolution had transformed into prison-cells, demanding of the keeper who conducted him, an apartment containing no other captives.

Having seen her safely locked in, and hearing her still sobbing on the bare, rudé pallet, he started at once to find Captain St. Liege, to announce his success.

This was accomplished sooner than he expected. Striding, shuffling and clanking his saber-scabbard along the hall, he was arrested by the regular tramp of soldiery. A company of *gens d'armes* appeared, filing on each side of the hall and encompassing a fresh lot of prisoners.

These prisoners were Lacroix, Phillipeaux, Camille-Desmoulins, and foremost, the notorious Danton.

Poilet St. Liege was in command, marching in the lead.

At sight of his tool and vassal, the captain halted those behind him and addressed the sergeant in an undertone:

"Ah! sergeant, my meeting you here makes me believe that you have succeeded in the task I gave you!"

"Ho! Jupiter! Yes! Madame is, by this time, in the *conciergerie*! Your prize—Mademoiselle Pearlina—is here!" pointing to the room beyond.

For the moment, seeming to forget his other

prisoners, in the satanic joy that thrilled him, St. Liege advanced to the small, square opening in the door and gazed for several seconds upon his intended victim.

"Mine! mine! at last!" were his jubilant thoughts. "Ah! lovely Pearlina, yes, you are mine! And if you do not consent to wed me, I have in store for you a fate that will make you wish for the guillotine to end the misery and torment it is in my power to inflict!"

This fiendish contemplation was interrupted by a deep voice at his side:

"Poor girl. What can have brought so pure a being here. I knew of her, very well. It is one Mademoiselle Pearlina. She has my sympathy. Why is she a prisoner?"

The speaker was Danton, who had advanced to the captain's side, even the *gens d'armes* hesitating to command back to his place in the ranks of prisoners that once potent man.

Even this inexorable exterminator had his sympathies, as history shows in his liberation of Duport, Barnave and Lameth, from the contemplative communistic massacres.

St. Liege wheeled angrily upon him:

"No business of yours, citizen! It is not for you, a culprit yourself, to question now regarding the prisoners of the Luxembourg!"

"Indeed! And who are you, to fly in my face? You—who are scarce better than a brat reared amid the filth, stench and rags of some vile cobbler's bench, though you be booted and spurred and in command of those who dare arrest Danton! But there, miserable fanatic! I forgot!"—sneeringly—"you are descended of better blood, and—you are a disgrace to it!"

The eyes and terrible voice of Danton made the villain quail.

"Away with this immaculate man! Away with all!" cried St. Liege, livid with rage, and pointing off with leveled sword. "Let us see, citizen, if you will be as brave before the jury when your accusation is made out!"

"Ay, and pelt them with pellets, as they speak, if I can find the convenience!" was the retort of this strange man, as he and the others were marched away by the soldiery.

CHAPTER XV.

CHARGE OF THE MASKED KNIGHT.

In the same moment that Latour de Cosnac fully realized the dilemma in which he was placed by the desertion of the apothecary, the absence of the ladder, the impenetrable darkness, and the prospective horror of slow and torturous death by starvation either in the putrid-smelling vault or the bone-strewn catacombs beyond—and while he stood riveted with almost paralyzing dismay at thought of some terrible fate which must have befallen his mother and Pearlina, to wring from their lips those piercing shrieks and cries for aid—he suddenly experienced a crawling touch upon his arm, gliding downward to his hand, and then a set of fingers, ice-cold, coiled within his own.

A low, warning hiss issued from an invisible source, and the grasp upon his hand tried to pull him forward.

"Ah! It is the mulatto servant of Paschal Broeck! I had quite forgotten him. Dog! where is your master? If this means treachery to me, I shall at least have one life before I am conquered. So, beware!"

And he drew the sharp dagger from his girdle, laying hold upon the arm of the hand that was pulling at him.

"But I forget, again. This fellow is deaf and mute. He hears not what I am saying. Perhaps he may lead me from this wretched hole. Let me not be too hasty."

He yielded to the tugging gripe, following blindly, though keeping his dagger ready for instant use.

Latour and his invisible guide passed through the aperture at the side of the vault, when the latter took up the guiding-cord with his disengaged hand and led the way slowly.

It was by no means the intention of the apothecary to leave the young man alone and lost in the dark labyrinth of passages. His plan had been to send madame, Pearlina and Latour first up into the chapel, then snatch away the ladder, put out the lights, and flee through the tangled depths beyond the vault, having secured the valuable casket which Madame Elise had so unwisely given to him.

The unexpected ambush in the chapel, the shout of John Killer, the tramp of soldiery, destroyed a portion of this plan—happening as it did, before Latour could ascend—leaving no course but to act as has been shown, with any certainty of retaining his prize.

As he wheeled away from and snatched the ladder, with that signal to Perrue which ordered out the lights, he made another sign, which said:

"I leave this young man to your care!"

Perrue having accompanied his master in numerous visits to and ramblings through the catacombs—being with him at the time of the discovery of that passage which led under the Seine and to the Castle de Cosnac—was equally familiar with several outlets, and signs and strings leading to the same, which both had arranged together.

Shoulder high on one of the walls was a con-

tinuous series of easily felt indents, along which Paschal Broeck rapidly slid the tips of his fingers; and these, and counting a certain number of cross-passages and turnings, very shortly enabled the apothecary to emerge by an inclined plane, at a round opening in a terrace near the bridge spanning across the Isle St. Louis.

By another and more tedious route—though by less critical means than that employed by the apothecary—and by a similar plane terminating in an orifice at the top, Perrue led Latour de Cosgnac to the upper air at a point almost opposite what is now known as Quai d'Orleans, where the angle of water separates it from what is now known as Quai Napoleon.

Here the mulatto tossed into the young man's arms a long, black, ample cloak with a hood, and immediately vanished.

The gaze of Latour was fixed in astonishment on Isle St. Louis. The glare of a large fire lighted up the heavens; men and women above him were running hither and thither excitedly, and the sound of the distant tocsin reverberated to his ears.

Castle de Cosgnac was in flames. Great sheets of fire, with the force and roar of a bellows-blown furnace, reared a scorching column on high, reflecting in red waves on the sky and vomiting seas of sparks that appeared to float and crackle among the stars.

The usually deserted streets—mostly deserted after nightfall during those troublous times—were brimming with humans who, with the huge bonfire of the castle, the sounding of the tocsin and the contagious spirit of a panic, supposing that another massacre was at hand, fled precipitately—some toward the scene of excitement, like crazed horses in a burning barn, and others in the opposite direction.

A dread entered the heart of Latour as the sight burst upon his vision.

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed. "What if my dear companions have perished in that secret room of the tower! For, see!—there is not one spot that is free from the flames! It surges up from everywhere! There could be no escape, now—not even the passage behind the panel, their only hope! This is the work of incendiaries!—assassins! Then hear me swear! for every life sacrificed within that sad-fated castle, where I was nursed and nourished to manhood, I will have a life from among the perpetrators of this foul deed! Ha! what is this? As I live—a battle!—a battle on the Quay stairs! See—three men!—they must be my companions of the tower!—beset by a score of the rabble! Now, kind Heaven, give me strength and quickness of foot!"

Thrilled in every vein by this last discovery, Latour ran from the spot, drawing the hooded cloak disguisingly about him as he mingled with the scampering, scattering people pouring pell-mell both ways across the bridge.

Marcus Baptiste had been wonderfully expeditious in executing the mission appointed him by Poilet St. Liege at the instigation of Sergeant John Killer.

With half-a-dozen *gens d'armes*, and the addition of a score of independent rogues picked up by the way, he proceeded to Castle de Cosgnac.

"Hol by my pikel!" was his infamous order. "I want you to sack, murder and destroy this detestable monument of nobility! Spare neither timber, stone nor flesh! Death to everything—and help yourselves!"

The torch was soon applied in many places, amid the hurrahs of the accompanying ruffians, while wholesale robbery and destruction progressed in the rich apartments. Innocent servants were slaughtered in their tracks, and a general carnage of most brutal character prevailed.

As the flames broke forth furiously, illuminating the pandemonium surrounding, men, women and soldiers could be seen rolling away casks or carrying baskets of wine, from the contents of which they became tipsy, revelous and wild.

When the conflagration was at its height, those few who had been awaiting the return of Latour in the secret chamber of the tower—and who, having easily learned the cause and danger of the tumult, had descended by the passage to the slab in the Quay stairs, where they remained until the dense smoke, penetrating downward, nearly suffocated them—low burst from their concealment to make a desperate dash for liberty.

But the vicious Baptiste was alert. He had watched this slab, expecting precisely what now occurred, and instantly upon their appearance, shouted:

"Hol! there they are! The conspirators of Castle de Cosgnac! Death to the dogs! Down with all conspirators!"

And the rioting crowd, which had fast augmented and was drunk with wine and carried away by excitement, took up the cry:

"Death! Death to the conspirators!"

Two of the five were slain on the spot. The remaining three, back to back, fought for their lives against terrible odds which overwhelmed them from every side.

"Vive la constitution!" cried one, flashing his sword right and left. "Die bravely, gentlemen! Let these assassins feel our bite before

they harpoon our jaws! Have at you all! Come on!"

Three bold and dexterous swordsmen were not so easily overcome, even by the close-packed and demoniac rioters, and skulls were shivered like shells as their owners pressed upon the valiant noblesse.

While they fought and hewed amid the fierce avalanche of pikes, sabers and cudgels, Marcus Baptiste hooted on his mob, joining in the attack like a frantic fiend, more frantic as he saw his followers held at bay by the courageous trio, who had already toppled several of their foes over the *garde-jou* into the Seine.

Suddenly, the scene changed. A new outcry arose.

A tall, muscular figure came bounding and charging upon the outside of the circle of conflict. A ponderous two-handed, doubled-edged sword rose and fell, chopping and slashing, mowing to the right and to the left, like a great scythe in a field of grain.

Latour de Cosgnac was among them, with his mask down, prominent in his characteristic accouterments and marvelous sword-play.

In front, behind, sideways circled and swept the fearful sword, sharp as a razor, like a great hurricane of steel.

As each one who opposed him went down, he advanced a step, and with one foot on the corpse, stood erect, clearing and broadening the space around and before him, thus fighting his way forward, step by step, over lifeless bodies.

Again the cry:

"The Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume!"

And De Cosgnac, above the clash and din of the struggle:

"Courage, comrades; I'll be with you presently!"

Such was the muscle and skill of Latour de Cosgnac. Every inch a warrior.

Marcus Baptiste glared like a ravenous tiger at this new and mighty intruder upon his revel and butchery. Gripping his curved saber resolutely, he forced his way toward the masked knight.

"Hol by my head! So you are the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume, who slew my comrades on the grand staircase of Castle de Cosgnac—a castle no more! I, Marcus Baptiste, am their avenger! Thou, dog of—"

Those were the last words he ever spoke. Down came the great sword with a frightful slash that pierced everything before it, and a headless human trunk fell upon the stones. Marcus Baptiste was no more.

As the leader of the mob fell, Latour reached the side of his friends, who received him with a grand huzza.

"Charge! charge!" he cried; and the four men hurled themselves into the midst of the already stampeding crowd, like so many thunderbolts let loose at once.

CHAPTER XVI.

IMPORTANCE OF JEAN VALASQUE.

SITUATED on Rue Vivienne—no matter at what exact point—was the large drug and perfumery store of Paschal Broeck, noted for its elegant and rich display, and its three careful and competent clerks, who conducted a busy and profitable business for an exacting employer seldom seen behind his own counter.

In the rear of the store was a small, neatly-furnished room, where, at certain hours, this famous and wealthy apothecary doctor received numerous calls and dispensed a vast quantity of paying prescriptions of his own invention or discovery, winning through their efficacy a name for learning and miracles.

From this room a long, narrow, darkened entryway led off to an ample laboratory crowded with every known contrivance for the consummation of experiments; and prominent among these things was a glass case containing a snake of the boa species.

Three times daily Paschal Broeck was wont to feed this disgusting pet. To-night, however, the hour for its supper had passed, and the snake, rendered infuriate by the neglect, was twisting, coiling, squirming, and in its rage beat furiously against the glass sides of its prison.

It was during the wrathful contortions of the monster pet that the apothecary entered his laboratory, carrying the stolen casket under his arm.

Observing at once the angry snake, he hastened to feed it; and when it had settled down in a lazy doze of satisfaction, he seated himself at a bench and turned his white, waxy, grinning face in triumph on the carpet.

"Blazes! It is here!" he chuckled. "In that casket I expect to find positive proof affirmative of what I have for so long suspected. Oh! here is the precious packet,"—as he pried open the lid and drew forth that packet to which Madame Elise had alluded in Chapter II. "Now we shall soon know whether or not Mademoiselle Pearlina is the person I suppose her to be. Ha!"—as his glittering eyes rapidly scanned the contents of the packet. "Blazes of lightning! 'Tis she! Hol! A mine! A fortune is in this discovery! I was sure of it! From her own

hands I will receive one-half of all the wealth I am able to give this angelic Pearlina! There is but one person in the world who would dare put forward an equal claim with her, if he knew of the rare luck to be found in Spain; my oath of vengeance—the vendetta—will soon remove him! Then Mademoiselle Pearlina will possess all—all—all—and half is for Paschal Broeck! Ha! ha! ha! Let me hasten at once to Jean Valasque! Only two more papers are necessary to establish everything. I must have the marriage certificate and the certificate of birth, which this document informs are in the hands of Simon Varienne. Simon Varienne and Jean Valasque—the knave ragman of Rue du Chiffonier—are one and the same. I will interview him immediately and I think I shall secure the papers without much difficulty, for when he sees me he will know me as one who could send his rogue neck to a halter. Now, then, for Jean Valasque!"

The precise nature of the valuable discovery which Paschal Broeck obtained from a perusal of the packet will be developed in a succeeding chapter.

Replacing the packet in the casket and locking up the latter in a strong closet, he went to the glass case and gently lifted out the snake. He induced the reptile to enter at the bosom of his gown and wind itself in loose folds around his body, presently projecting its flat head and turning a pair of eyes, like scintillating rubies, on its master. Paschal Broeck softly smoothed the fearful head and playfully inserted his fingers in the toothless jaws. Then throwing a hat over his red-capped head, he started out through the night.

He could plainly see the reflection from the burning castle, and divining what it was, muttered:

"Ha! The castle is afire, I believe! Those young conspirators who are, as I am aware, in the secret chamber of the tower, will be roasted alive, no doubt! Rather a pity—but their own fault!"

Once he was halted by one of the patrols which in the time of this story, regularly marched in every street of Paris after dark. But the leader, recognizing the apothecary, said:

"No matter; it is only Paschal Broeck the notorious doctor-druggist, going, I venture, on a medical visit. Let him pass."

"Most excellent friend, you have hit it exactly. I am on my way to a child suffering with cancer—having just left the sick chamber of four very poor people prostrated by a most malignant and highly-contagious fever," said Paschal Broeck, with much professional gravity and a profound bow.

"Pass on, then, quickly! We want no atmosphere of contagion in our nostrils!" exclaimed the leader of the patrol.

Arriving at the second-hand clothing store of Jean Valasque—which, like all stores and residences at that date, was closed early in the evening—the apothecary passed round to a rear door, and, turning his back to this door, he bestowed several lively kicks upon it with the heel of his low-cut gaiter.

Simultaneously with the sound of the kicks, there was a loud, jingling crash within the building.

"Oh! somebody has fallen and got a broken neck, judging by that crash!" he exclaimed, kicking smartly again on the bottom of the door.

CHAPTER XVII.

JEAN VALASQUE AND THE APOTHECARY.

THE second-hand clothing store of Jean Valasque was remarkable for the dingy plainness of its exterior and the immense traffic carried on over its counters, benches, shelves and drawers even into the epoch of the Revolution, which stagnated all branches of business, and finally closed so many with the advent of the "reign of terror."

He was a man of cunning as well as avarice, and shrewdly aiming to gain and maintain continual favor with that grade of population to which a person of his occupation must look for patronage, had considerably popularized himself at all of the numerous liquor dens which thrived amid the evil surrounding of the Assassins' Causeway—that treacherous alley or court previously mentioned as being at the rear of *Cafe Melange*.

A long, one-story, tunnel-like structure of wood, with doors like those of a barn and windows corresponding, of thick timber, heavily hasped and barred upon the inside.

At the extreme rear of the promiscuous store was a small, square room, having a door, but no window—containing a desk, a cot and a stove—and at the desk, by the smoky glimmer of a solitary lamp, sat Jean Valasque, a corpulent, smooth-shaven, short-haired rascal of bloated mien.

On the desk before him were piles of paper money, carefully packaged and labeled, and his two fat hands were running greedily through a heap of coin that might have measured a quarter-of-a-peck.

"Ayha! Ayha!" he grunted, as his eyes feasted on the hoarded money. "Here is the luck of Jean Valasque. Fruits of toil—golden

fruit in paper money sheathings. Far better luck for Jean Valasque, than when he was not Jean Valasque, but Simon Varienne. Oh! Heaps of money—all my own—all honest. Think of that!—honest money earned by Jean Valasque. All made by this most profitable business of junked clothing, where the buyer knows he is being cheated, and therefore is not cheated. Ayha! So long as it pays to be honest, I trust I may not be tempted to return to the life that was mine at the time, and after the time, when I was the ourang-outang assistant of Mazgarus, the magician. Ugh! Why will I forever be recalling the man of that name? But I sometimes feel as if the ghost of Mazgarus—whom I stabbed and robbed after our last tour through Germany—is following me invisibly about, to watch the thief of his gold. But I am sure, that if the ghost of Mazgarus, the magician, were to step in upon me at this moment, it would say: 'Keep the gold, Simon Varienne, keep it. For by it, though gotten in crime, you have become an honest merchant, and the world has lost a great scamp!' Yes, I have no doubt, at all, that if Mazgarus, the magician—Eh! Ayha! Ho!" and with the last—while his guilty mind was absorbed by reflections upon the possible ghost of some one he had killed, or attempted to kill, and his whole frame, in consequence, peculiarly sensitive to any sudden shock—his heels flew into the air, the stool overturned, and Jean Valasque, with a heap of jingling, scattering, rolling coin, went backward, with a crash, to the bare floor.

For at the very moment that the name of Mazgarus, the magician, or the ghost of that person, was upon the mumbling rogue's lips, the lonely silence of the apartment was broken by those loud and lively kicks upon the door, from the gaiter-heels of Paschal Broeck.

"Daggers of fire and destruction upon Mazgarus!" he exclaimed, gathering himself up, and collecting the money pieces from the floor. "I was thinking so deeply of him, that I imagined the knock to come from the knuckles of his ghostship! Ay—wait a moment," as another succession of kicks sounded on the door. "That knave, whoever he may be, is in a great hurry. It will not do for any one to know that I keep so much money on the premises. There are plenty who would assassinate me, to gain one-half of what I keep in this desk. Ay—I am coming directly!" he snarled, as a third summons of kicks and thumps banged upon the door. "Wait patiently, or, on my soul, you shall not enter at all."

Concealing every evidence of his recent miserly occupation, he proceeded to the door with a curt speech ready for whoever had so imperatively disturbed him.

But no sooner was the door ajar, and the rays of the lamp fell athwart the face of the apothecary standing there, than Jean Valasque gave a gulping, startled snort, staggered back a step, then threw up his hands and ran to the far side of the room.

Paschal Broeck stepped noiselessly inside, closing the door behind him and removing his hat. He stood motionless, his grinning face and piercing eyes turned upon the strangely terrified Valasque.

The fat body of the junk clothier cowered close to the wall, against the shabby mass of coats, cloaks and pants hanging there, and he gulped, dumb and bewildered, at the corner.

"Haub!" flashed rapidly across his brain. "I have just been speaking of Mazgarus, the magician! That man, or his ghost, is now before me! It must be the ghost!—for, had Mazgarus survived the stab I gave him, he would not have waited all these years before wreaking vengeance. The face—the face of a dead man; the eyes—like those of a cobra; the hands—white as a lady's; that fixed and infernal grin—all these belonged to Mazgarus, the magician! Ay, the ghost, I am sure!—though Mazgarus, when I was his servant, had hair as long as a woman's, a mustache that drooped to his collar and—while this man—"

"Well, Jean Valasque, why do you stare so? Blazes! do you take me to be a ghost?"

"Oh! He asks me that, when it is exactly what I am thinking about!"

"Be not alarmed, rascal; I am only Paschal Broeck, the apothecary, of whom you may have heard."

"Good. Yes, I have heard of this Paschal Broeck. Then he is no ghost, and I am acting the idiot. But, it is no wonder that I at first firmly believed him to be the ghost of Mazgarus, the magician, since he so closely resembles that person." And aloud: "My name is not 'rascal,' but Jean Valasque, an honorable merchant, I'd have it understood."

"I have pressing business with you. Be seated, while I state it."

"No. There is but one stool, as I never expect visitors here. Seat yourself."

"Sit down, Jean Valasque," commanded the apothecary, pointing to the stool, while the mesmeric glitter of his eyes grew more intense.

"Daggers of fire!" thought Valasque, quailing under the burning gaze of his scarlet-capped visitor. "This man has eyes of flame. Something in them seems to say: 'Obey me, or I will show you a way to compel you!'" Then,

as he thumped his fat body down upon the stool: "There—since you will have it so."

Paschal Broeck half-seated himself on the edge of the desk, leaning slightly forward until his eyes seemed to fasten on the very soul of the shrinking fellow. At the same time the huge snake protruded its head from the bosom of the apothecary's gown, exhibiting its long, split tongue, as if about to snap at the swollen nose of the junkman.

The veins of Valasque almost congealed with horror. The eyes of the apothecary and the orbs of the snake held him stiffened in every muscle. A livid hue overspread his countenance, and each particular root of his close-cropped hair twitched with electric itching.

"Simon Varienne," said the apothecary, stroking the head of the reptile at his bosom—"Simon Varienne, I would like to know, and you can tell me, what has become of Cybele St. Liege?"

"Cybele St. Liege!" echoed the villain, astonished at the question, and at the utterance of that other name which he had borne many years before.

"Did you not hear me distinctly? I plainly said: 'Cybele St. Liege.' Perhaps you have forgotten her. Then I may slightly prick your memory." Here the visage of the apothecary assumed a hue and expression both corpse and vulture-like. "You may recall that, in Germany, a certain woman named Cybele St. Liege wedded one Count Andrew Horstmarck, a Franco-Teutonic nobleman. Espousing the French, he was, for a long time, an able minister of finance. Through the intrigue of enemies, jealous of his abilities and eminence, he was finally deposed, and, on some small pretense of crime, imprisoned in one of the most loathsome dungeons of the Bastille, the door of which dungeon was never again opened, after the moment of his confinement, until the abominable Bastille was demolished by the early mob of the Revolution. Acting upon instructions received from Cybele—robbing her, at the same time, of all the ready money she could secure, while laying helpless on a sick bed—you secured the parched skeleton of Count Andrew, polished the bones, articulated the whole very nicely, then placed it in a strong box. You had been a sort of attendant upon Count Andrew, and were in the service of his persecuted wife when deprived of her husband—neither of whom had ever suspected how great a vagabond-rascal you were, nor that you had once stabbed and robbed Mazgarus, the magician, by whom you were employed as an assistant in his exhibitions—"

Upon hearing these words, the spell that bound Jean Valasque was broken.

"Oh! oh!" he groaned and exclaimed, in his inmost soul. "Tis he! Mazgarus, the magician! He is here to kill me! I may as well die game, as like a trembling coward!" And aloud, he cried: "I know you, now! You are Mazgarus himself! You have hupped me out at last! You are here for vengeance! I thought you were his ghost. But since you are flesh and blood—daggers of fire—I shall fight for my life! Take that!—and that!—and that!"

He flashed out a sharp knife, and gripping this with all the strength of a man desperate in the belief that he must defend his life, aimed three terrible blows at the face and neck of the apothecary, snorting and blurring with each stroke:

"Take that!—and that!—and that!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEMAND OF PASCHAL BROECK.

NOT one of the three fierce blows aimed by Jean Valasque at the apothecary inflicted any injury.

By dextrously ducking and dodging his head, Paschal Broeck avoided the first two stabs, and as the murderous knife descended for a third attempt, he caught the massive arm of his assailant in a wonderful gripe and twist that nearly dislocated the wrist.

In the same second he uttered a quick, whistling hiss, and the huge snake, rapidly emerging from the bosom of his gown, shot up his extended arm, around the arm of Valasque, then around his neck, then around his other arm—forcing both arms backward, as if being slowly and resistlessly pinioned from behind—and finally reared its horrid head in his very face, after a final turn around the waist.

Terror supplanted the desperate mood of the junkman. The coil at his throat was strangling him; his ribs were being forced inward until he fancied he could hear them cracking and crumbling. Grasping the neck of the reptile he tried to force it from him, expecting a bite from the poisonous jaws, and went staggering and pitching about the room, while he gurgled and gasped:

"Paschal Broeck, apothecary! Mazgarus, magician! Devil of both! Help! Save me from this thing! I choke! I am being squeezed to a jelly! Help!"

Tighter drew the merciless coils. Wild and madly stamped and struggled Jean Valasque in the folds of the great snake. At last he fell, in an insensible lump, upon the floor.

The same low, whistling hiss which had set on the snake now called it off. It left the pro-

strate body, obedient to the signal, and the master fondled it approvingly.

When Jean Valasque recovered consciousness, a few moments later, he saw the snake coiled at the feet of the apothecary, in an attitude ready to leap forward and strike, and the sight inspired fright, for Valasque was not aware that the jaws were toothless.

Paschal Broeck was quietly picking his nails with the dagger.

"Mercy! mercy, Mazgarus!" he moaned, abjectly, as if afraid to make a motion to rise, lest the dread snake should again attack and slay him outright.

"Ah! you sue for mercy, do you, Simon?"

"Because I am now satisfied that you are Mazgarus, the magician, whom I stabbed and robbed in Germany. You intend to have my life for that stab, and because I again tried to stab you a few moments since. Spare me! Mercy!"

"Ay, Simon Varienne, I am that Mazgarus, the wizard and conjurer, whom you suppose me to be!" said the apothecary, standing before the prostrate and groveling man and sending every word into his brain like arrows of menace and torture. "Now, sit you there—bow-legged villain!—and listen to me, attentively."

Valasque arose to a sitting position, with his legs crossed, eying his tormentor in momentary expectation of a death-stroke.

Broeck drew forward the stool, saying, as he sat down upon it:

"I am glad you know me as Mazgarus, the magician, for then you must also be aware that I can and will give your head to the executioner, if you do not answer all my questions truthfully and obey my commands."

"Ayha! let me be your willing dog! Let me be anything—only let me live!"

"We shall see about that, later. To resume: When you had placed the skeleton in a box—and unknown to Cybele, the wife of the dead Count Andrew Horstmarck, for you informed her that some students had robbed you of it—in a humor of your own, you had it conveyed to Castle de Cosnac, with the information that it was the father of the child, the waif, adopted by the Baron de Cosnac, and christened Pearlina. This waif, this girl, was placed by you in the carriage of Madame Elise, when it was an infant, it having been born a few months after the imprisonment of Count Andrew. You had spirited it away upon your own account, with view to eventually demanding an enormous reward from Cybele, its mother. When she was suffering with that sickness I have mentioned, you feared that she was at the point of death and that you would lose all chance of the reward. You visited her and promised, for a certain sum, to tell her all the truth, also to assist the child in obtaining its rights. Strangely, she put faith in your sworn promises—being delirious with joy at learning that her child still lived—and gave you everything upon which she could realize at the time, besides two certificates: one of her marriage with Count Andrew; another of the birth of their child. Did you ever send those documents to Madame Elise, or to anybody else?"

"No—truly, no."

"Blazes! I am glad to hear that. Now, what became of Cybele St. Liege, who was the wife of Count Andrew?"

"She died. I swear it!"

"Perhaps was strangled or suffocated by you—eh, Simon?"

"No—no—by the day of judgment!—She died by the disease you mentioned."

"You are mistaken, master Simon. She lived."

"Lived, you say? Impossible! She was as good as dead when I left her!"

"Nevertheless, I have proof that she survived, at least for some days. And you have been intending, when the Mademoiselle Pearlina—for that was the name given her—attained her twentieth birthday, which is but seven days hence, to produce those certificates and exact a round consideration for aiding in establishing her identity and title to her unfortunate father's possessions in Germany. Because we both well know that Count Andrew—who very wisely shaped his will many months prior to his imprisonment, being advised of the possibility of an heir—stipulated that, in the event of the death of both himself and wife, his child or children should elect a guardian, and not attain full proprietorship over his vast lands until it, or each, had reached the age of twenty years. Eh, Simon? Oh, most cunning Simon Varienne, or Jean Valasque, as you now call yourself," and the grin on his death-face grew broader, as he keenly surveyed the uneasy and fidgeting Valasque.

"Most noble Mazgarus!" whined the subdued villain, greatly surprised at the knowledge possessed by the apothecary—"you are, truly, a wizard, to ascertain all these things, which I pronounce correct in every particular. As you know, I am your slave; and you have but to whisper the prime object of your visit here, to have it gratified. I marvel, however, at your ability to find out so much."

"By most natural means, Simon. You left Cybele, firmly believing that she would die within one hour. But you were mistaken. She

recovered strength enough—and with it a misgiving that she had intrusted too much to you, a man of such acknowledged villainy—to write a full statement, and sign it in the presence and with the witness of responsible notaries, showing who her child was, where to be found, and what entitled to; inclosing with the statement the original will of Count Andrew, her husband. This packet she caused to be delivered to Madame Elise, who had assumed the care of a mother toward Pearlina—instructing, however, that the packet should not be opened until Pearlina was twenty years of age, and, consequently, qualified to assert her rights."

Valasque was doubly astonished by this information.

"Now, Jean Valasque—as I think I shall address you, because the name of Simon Varienne makes me feel like throttling you, in return for that stab you gave me in Germany—now, Jean Valasque, I have told you what I know; hear what I want. Produce those two certificates, instantly, or else you will never leave this house alive, or go out to be hung for a rascally assassin!"

"Most worthy Paschal Broeck—for such I must call you, as the name of Mazgarus makes me feel already like a dead man—most admirable apothecary, as I have declared, I am your obedient dog. If you will remove that detestable snake, I will, with pleasure, give you the two certificates. Am I then to understand that my life is spared?"

"You are spared, at least, until I get through with you," replied Broeck, as, by his customary signal, he recalled the snake and soon had it ensconced in his bosom, around his body.

CHAPTER XIX.

PREDICAMENT OF JEAN VALASQUE.

JEAN VALASQUE, feeling assured that he need not apprehend any further danger from the large and powerful snake, scrambled to his feet and went to the desk.

"Until he is through with me," he repeated, mentally. "So, I am not to be let off so easily, it seems. I am to do something more for this devil-of-a-man. Mazgarus, the magician—I mean Paschal Broeck, the apothecary—before he relieves me of the fear of danger from his or the executioner's hands. I very much question whether the block and executioner are not preferable to the means which this terrible man can devise for his own vengeance, for I know that Mazgarus is capable of inventions mutilative as well as magical. He may take a notion to cut off my ears, or my nose, or out with my tongue—next off with my fingers or my head, as he used to perform deceivingly, but now may do earnestly. Backed as he is with that snake, and with other resources which, no doubt, could annihilate me on the instant—for I am satisfied that he has measured his power fully before coming here—I am sure that my only safety lies in obeying him. Curses! For years I have lived in anticipation of the harvest of gold to be reaped when I could demand my own price for establishing the waif of the house De Cosgnac in her rights. It is too hard to have it snatched from me in this way—from a man earning an honest living. How—by all the fiends!—did Mazgarus survive the stab I gave him in Germany?—and what devilish chance brought him here?"

"Ho! Be in a hurry there, Jean Valasque. My stock of patience is very limited. Blazes! I have a task for you to perform yet, this very night."

"Your dog obeys you," said Valasque, turning and extending the papers: the certificates of the marriage and the birth.

"Oh, yes! you talk now as you spoke when you were my servant in Germany."

Jean Valasque bowed servilely as he handed the papers to the man he both feared and hated. But the bow was to hide a look of unsuppressible rage which convulsed his every lineament as he thus, without a protest, delivered over what had, for so long, been to him a vast fortune in prospect.

"There are the certificates of the marriage and the birth, which I freely yield."

"How glibly he lies!" was the mental comment of Paschal Broeck, receiving and carefully stowing away the papers. And aloud: "Now, Jean Valasque, you are to go out and do a little spying for me."

"If spying?"

"I am sorry to find you so nearly deaf. Listen. It is highly probable that Madame Elise and Mademoiselle Pearlina are at this moment confined, together or separately, in a prison, or prisons, of Paris. You are to find out all about it. Give me a pen, ink and paper—so. If such is the case, you are to liberate them—"

"If liberate them?"

"—Bring them here. I know that there is a convenient cellar beneath this building, where they can be concealed until further arrangements are made to get them out of Paris. Take these three orders"—giving him three hastily-scribbled papers. "Read them. Get a band of assassins from the Causeway. Distribute this gold among them, and instruct them"—giving Valasque a bag of gold. "You know what I mean, and you know what you are to do. The

management of my plan is left to your own contrivance. The third letter is for Captain St. Liege. Deliver it in person. And, mark you: let nothing—no matter what—even at the peril of your life—prevent your carrying out what I see you already comprehend; for, remember, Mazgarus orders, and if you do not obey, I will blow out your brains. To insure success, you had best be dressed as a guardsman—"

The thick, spluttering lips of Jean Valasque interrupted him, exclaiming, while his eyes dilated:

"What! You think that such a bold thing can be done? Impossible! Spare me, I beg, most mighty Maz-las-gar-apothecary! Spare!" Before the apothecary could speak further, there was another summons at the door of the dingy office, like poundings from a saber-hilt.

Valasque trembled from head to foot. He had been long in dread of one of those "domiciliary visits" of the patrol, which generally resulted in the assassination of the occupants of the houses; and the rap of the sword hilt seemed to say:

"Jean Valasque, your turn has come!"

At the first stroke of the summons, Paschal Broeck leaped from the stool and darted behind the numerous hanging cloaks and other apparel against the wall.

"Answer promptly. Go to the door," commanded the apothecary from his concealment.

Quaking as if with an ague, the corpulent and cowardly Valasque obeyed.

Four cloaked and hooded men pushed their way into the room, banging and barring the door behind them.

The foremost of these threw aside his disguise as he entered, and the unnerved and shivering Valasque beheld the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume, of whom he had heard and upon whose head he knew there was a heavy price set.

Latour immediately and sternly addressed the junk clothier, without throwing up his mask:

"I think you are Jean Valasque, the proprietor of this place?"

Valasque was quite relieved upon finding that it was not the dread patrol which had entered his premises, but he experienced much uneasiness, with no little apprehension, aroused to strange portent by this visit of the Masked Knight at so late an hour—it then being after ten o'clock. He greeted them affably enough, saying, as he bowed humbly:

"You are right. I am Jean Valasque, who has the honor to be at your service."

Paschal Broeck, peering cautiously between the lapels and sleeves of the garments concealing him, muttered, under his breath:

"Blazes! What can have brought the valiant knight of the two-edged sword to the shop of Jean Valasque?"

Latour continued:

"I am glad to hear you say 'at your service.' For we mean to demand a service of you, Jean Valasque."

"Anything in my power, gentlemen."

"I and my companions have just come from a serious affray on Isle St. Louis. We think that we have been pursued. We need a few hours' rest, which we are willing to take anywhere upon your piles of clothing. Before daylight—mind, before daylight—you must supply us with the garbs of rough fishermen, and razor and stain our faces, for which you may expect good pay. You will accompany us a short distance down the Seine, however, for we do not care to have you set a band of soldiers on our track. So, stir about, and make up something on which to stretch our limbs."

Jean Valasque was filled with alarm, both at the prospect of harboring a notorious personage so eagerly sought for by the authorities, and at recollection of the apothecary's threat to blow out his brains if he permitted anything to interfere with the mission recently assigned him.

"Noble gentlemen!" he cried, in great trepidation, "I beg of you to reconsider. I am a poor merchant, trying to obtain an honest and peaceable living. If you are found in my house we will all be guillotined together."

"Blazes!" exclaimed the apothecary, mentally. "Then I will be kept a prisoner behind these dirty rags all night. For I have no doubt that Latour de Cosgnac believes me to be the author of the trap at the chapel near St. Genevieve, and will spit me at sight with that big sword he carries!"

"But we must not be found, Jean Valasque," said Latour, meaningly. "Nor will you have an opportunity to betray us: for I do not require sleep for myself—besides having some plans to form—and will remain awake to see that you do not leave this room until you go with us. Hark you, knave! you deserve that I should run you through. I have reason to believe it was your bloody hand that dealt the first saber-stroke on the head of the unhappy Princess de Lamballe. But I will go so far as to spare you, if you serve us as I desire."

Jean Valasque had taken a prominent part in the horrible assassination and mutilation of Louisa of Savoy, when that unfortunate lady was dragged into the midst of a ravenous populace.

He had heard of the daring deeds of the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume, who, with several others, had become avengers of the early and present victims of the Revolution—appearing and vanishing mysteriously, his identity unknown, baffling all attempts to capture him, eluding the keenest spies, and invariably leaving a track of retribution wherever he figured.

The junk clothes-dealer had long lived in fear of a meeting with this invincible and relentless man, lest his own head should fall, as others had, in retaliation for the sacrifice of the Princess Lamballe.

To realize that he was now at the mercy of the Masked Knight, to hear the announcement that he would not be allowed to leave the room, and remembering the promise of the apothecary to blow out his brains if he did not immediately take those steps intended for the release of Madame Elise and Pearlina—all combined to fill the heart and brain of Jean Valasque with palpitations of terror.

Ere he could reply to Latour, there was another heavy knock upon the door, and the quaking villain thought:

"This time it is certainly the patrol! I plainly see that this is to be the last night of my life! Yes, I am a dead man! Come, gentlemen," he said, quickly; "that is the patrol. Let me hide you in the cellar. Haste."

"Conceal my friends," whispered Latour. "I will remain in hiding here. I do not think it is the patrol; more likely some of those who pursued us from Isle St. Louis. And, mark well: if you say one word to betray us, or attempt to leave the house, I have a brace of bullets ready."

The young man rolled himself beneath the cot before mentioned, drawing down the counterpane until it touched the floor.

Valasque hurried into the main store, followed by the three young nobles, and these he forced down a ladder into the deep, dark cellar, closing the trap and throwing a high heap of clothing over it.

The summons from without grew impatient and louder.

Frightened, weak, and extremely nervous, Jean Valasque slowly opened the door.

On the threshold stood Sergeant Jack the Giant Killer, with one great boot planted on the doorsill, pike in hand, and his fierce, owl-like eyes glaring into the room.

CHAPTER XX.

ST. LIEGE AND HIS CAPTIVE.

THE many prisons of Paris were a woeful sight in the days of that Revolution which dethroned and beheaded Louis XVI., also his queen, and consigned the youthful heir to a condition of idiocy, filth and misery.

Filled to bursting, surrounded by odious accumulations, in many instances deprived of even the boon of sunlight to solace their martyrdom, the wretched beings, victims of fanatical policies, dragged through their hours with one constant and frightful specter tormenting thought and slumber—the guillotine; whole crowds of men and women, lamenting but not daring to protest or plead, thronged the streets and gardens before and about the martialled palaces or private hotels of detention, vainly striving for a glimpse of loved ones confined and doomed never to walk forth until the signal for their death was given.

Woeful indeed, when one of the most hardened emissaries of the Committee—Farquier Tinvillle—declared that, to his eyes, the waters of the Seine seemed to be red with the blood of the victims.

All grades, all classes and sexes were hustled promiscuously together; high and low alike to fall beneath the horrible ax.

Even Lacroix was astounded at the multitude of sufferers by that epoch, the devastation of which was daily rebounding upon the heads of men who had been prime movers in its earlier generation, finally involving him in the uncontrollable machinery which drew all notorious heads to the scaffold.

In one of the dampest apartments of the Conciergerie, in atmospheres disgusting almost to suffocation, provided with nothing but a pile of old and rotten straw, lay Madame Elise. She was informed of her whereabouts, and well knew that a speedy death was in store; for it was a rule that the prisoners of the Conciergerie were those who had but a short time to live.

Three items pressed heavily upon the distracted mind of Madame Elise: the knowledge that she was doomed beyond release; the loss of the valuable casket; the separation from Pearlina, of whose fate she dared not even conjecture. And as she lay in the darkness of her solitary imprisonment, she wept and prayed alternately to that Heaven which seemed to have deserted her.

At the Luxembourg there was a tableau.

Captain Poilet St. Liege, having disposed of his new revolutionarily illustrious prisoners, and dismissing the *gens d'armes*, softly entered the cell of his fair captive and intended victim.

Pearlina had fared better than madame, in the manner of her imprisonment, having a clean floor, a freshly-made couch and a few articles of convenience in her apartment.

She half lay, half sat on the couch, with her face buried in the pillow, sobbing aloud, and so engrossed with the outburst of her grieving that she did not hear the light footsteps of St. Liege as he approached.

He stood over her with folded arms, contemplating her with the gloating of a vampire, fairly nervous with exultation.

"My sweet Pearlina," he said, gently.

She sprung from the couch and shrunk away from him. Her eyes dried and she gazed upon him with that feeling which, by instinct, enters the heart in the presence of near but undiscovered peril.

"Well, monsieur, who are you?"

"Angelica Pearlina! I am Captain Poilet St. Liege—your slave, if you will."

"St. Liege! My slave! You! Ah! I begin to see"—with a shudder. "I am your prisoner, then—yours; and I think I know what I have to expect. You have won—so says report—reputation for cruelty! But, I have done nothing! Will you not have me released? Restore me to Madame Elise—my adopted mother—whom I love so dearly?"

"Poor girl. Madame Elise can be of no service to you. She is to die to-morrow."

"Die! She to die! Oh, spare her!" cried the shocked maiden. "And I suppose that I am to die, also. If you will but let us die together—for I do not care to live alone. Oh, Latour! Latour! You must be doomed as we are!"

It did not occur to her that Latour had escaped at the time of her own capture, she having been dragged so rudely and rapidly from the chapel near St. Genevieve, and believing that her lover was probably secured by others of those who were ambushed there.

At mention of Latour, the schemer's eyes sparkled angrily.

"Yes, you would be alone," he averred, "for Latour de Cosgnac—your lover—will die to-morrow. You alone have the power to save Madame Elise and her son, through my power."

"I? You say that I can save them? Tell me how!"

"Do not forget that night of the banquet given by the queen, in honor of the occasion when all difficulties appeared to be adjusted between her husband and the Assembly. I was bold and foolish enough—foolish, because it was only our first meeting—to whisper that I had conceived a violent and honorable passion for you. Ah! I see you do remember it."

Pearline had started as if stung.

"Can I ever forget it?" she exclaimed, with vehemence. "You dared to whisper that and more, as if you supposed me to be no better than the painted and shameless mistresses bustling in the tribunes! Let me remind you that I called to my relief a true gentleman, Latour de Cosgnac, who punished you for the insult!"

"We will not recall unpleasant things. I love you, beautiful Pearlina. I would wed you, and, by so doing, I can save you from the fate awaiting you."

"That fate—"

"Is death—perhaps."

"Well you?—never!"

"Have you paused to weigh my power?" questioned the villain. "I can avert the doom in store for Madame Elise; I can set free, and send out of Paris, Latour de Cosgnac. The price for this service is yourself."

"You are a monster!"

"It is my love for you, and my determination to possess you, that makes me so. Let no time be wasted upon this delicate and important matter. Your answer, adorable Pearlina. If you refuse, I will have you placed in a position to see the procession of death on its way to Place de la Revolution. Madame will look toward you, with eyes soon to close in eternal sleep, and their glance will say: 'Misguided and obstinate Pearlina! It is through your silly sentiment that I am about to be butchered; for you might have saved me!' The voice of Latour de Cosgnac will ring back from the grave, saying: 'Behold! I died, when a whisper from you could have saved me!—and yet you have encountered, knowingly, a fate far worse than the honorable wedlock offered by Poilet St. Liege.' For remember: though I do adore you, lovely Pearlina, I have the power to exact what I desire. And when you have heard the death shrieks of those you love the best, you will still be my prisoner, and I may not see fit to offer even marriage! Be reasonable, then. Hail you hear that cry? Some unlucky human dog is being dragged to the garden or the street by assassins. How would you like that I should order Madame Elise to be served thus?"

There was a sound of trampling and scuffling outside, accompanied by shrieks and piteous wails. Some poor wretch, to satisfy the thirst of an insatiable mob, was being dragged out for immolation in the gardens of the Luxembourg.

The threat of Poilet St. Liege, the horrible picture he drew, and the cries of the party being dragged away by the assassins, all smote like burning coals upon her dizzy brain, until she started in wild alarm upon her persecutor, and for a second, clapped her hands to her ears, as if to shut out at once the sound of his malicious voice and the wails of agony in the hall.

"Mercy! Do not say more!" she gasped. "How could you ever expect me to willingly wed with a man who so boldly proclaims himself the worst of brutes? I cannot—will not! Death is preferable!"

"I have told you that you can save them by assenting to my proposal," spoke the outwardly calm, cold villain. "I must add, that even their death will not exempt you from my purpose. You are to be my wife—or worse. Choose for yourself."

"Fearful man! God will punish you for this!"

"Choose, Mademoiselle Pearlina, while you can."

"Oh! not now—not now! Give me time to think."

"Granted. The executions will occur at twelve to-morrow. Earlier than that hour I will present myself for your answer. *Au revoir.*"

Stern and haughty of step, St. Liege withdrew, pausing for a second at the door to glance back upon Pearlina, who, even in her distress and pallor, was an image of beauty to fire the pulse of the beholder.

So far the events of the night were highly satisfactory to the plots of Poilet St. Liege. He had no doubt that she would yield under the goading necessities his wicked lips had portrayed.

Repairing to his sumptuous apartments near headquarters, the captain, when alone, assumed a new demeanor. All reserve and moody looks vanished; he paced to and fro with a devilish smile upon his face, giving low but gay vent to the exuberance of anticipation.

He was interrupted by the appearance of an orderly.

"A billet for the captain," announced the man, saluting.

The note brought a sudden check to the diabolical pleasure of St. Liege. He read it over twice, then stared at it in silent bewilderment. This was what caused his astonishment:

"CAPTAIN POILET ST. LIEGE:

"You will find Mademoiselle Pearlina at the store of Jean Valasque, a clothier, on Rue du Chiffonier. Come at once. A FRIEND."

And at the foot of the scrawl, evidently penciled by another than the first writer:

"The captain had better take the advice of 'a friend' and go with force, as he will meet those who are prepared to defend mademoiselle to the death."

"Perdition! What can this mean?" he exclaimed, "when I have so recently left Mademoiselle Pearlina my secure prisoner!"

Excited by, though not comprehending the singular missive, yet ever alive to suspicion, he rushed forth, mounted, and galloped back to the Luxembourg.

The explanation soon came. And then the surprised keepers saw a man transformed into a mad tiger, striding up and down and hurling maledictions upon the heads of everybody.

"Why, it was your own order, captain!" declared one. "Here is the written authority, over your own signature, upon which we relinquished the person of Mademoiselle Pearlina. He who presented it was a big bull-of-a-man—a soldier with a new spiked helmet—followed by half a dozen assassins with faces like imps of the infernal regions. She is assuredly dead by this time. I think he said that he had orders to kill her on the open street—"

St. Liege broke in with a vehement oath.

"A lie! A trick! A forgery! I would rather have lost my right arm than to lose her!"

He started off immediately. Again he mounted and dashed away, spurring his horse savagely and almost choking with rage.

In a short time a squad of musketeers—the first assistance he could secure—were marching briskly toward the store of Jean Valasque, the captain leading on foot. At the same time a messenger, with special instructions, was hastening to the Conciergerie. For he was quick to conclude that there must be a plan afoot—a bold and cunning plan—for the liberation of Madame Elise and Pearlina.

"Diable!" he snarled. "I shall checkmate this game. Madame Elise shall die to-morrow, I solemnly vow! And there shall be vacancies among the keepers at the Luxembourg—I vow that, also!"

CHAPTER XXI.

VALASQUE AND THE SERGEANT.

THE effects produced by the appearance of Sergeant John Killer in the doorway of the establishment of Jean Valasque, were various upon that individual himself and the two men who, to the knowledge of Valasque, were concealed within the dingy room.

Simultaneous with the opening of the door, the gruff voice of the sergeant halloed boisterously:

"Ho! Jupiter! friend Jean, here I am again!" swaggering forward and slapping the junk clothier familiarly on the shoulder.

"Enter!—Ayha!—Good. Welcome, friend Killer!" exclaimed Jean Valasque, evidently well pleased to receive this visitor.

For Valasque and the sergeant—two well-matched rogues, though not equally bold—were

most sociable comrades, having emptied many bottles of wine together in the low gregarious of the Assassins' Causeway, and at frequent times swearing over a game at cards in that same bare and dismal back office.

"Blazes!" muttered Paschal Broeck, cramming a sleeve-cuff into his mouth to smother the exclamation. "There is the fellow who attacked the Castle de Cosgnac, and who, I have reason to believe, captured Madame Elise and Mademoiselle Pearlina at the chapel near St. Genevieve—though how he learned of our going there is a mystery to me."

The eyes of Latour flashed, unseen, from beneath the edge of the counterpane, watching the comer.

"It is the same scoundrel whom I saw among the pikemen on the grand staircase," were the young man's thoughts. "And by the sound of his voice, I judge him to be the one who uttered those loud orders at the chapel, where my mother and Pearlina were entrapped. For that deed of betrayal, I shall yet smite off the head of Paschal Broeck. This soldier ruffian must not escape me, either. Let me first learn what brings him to the store of Jean Valasque. They are friends, I see."

Jean Valasque pushed out the stool, on which the sergeant sat down with a thump that made his heavy accouterments rattle.

"I have had a busy night of it, comrade. An attack on Castle de Cosgnac—which, I have since learned, has been reduced to ashes—where I saw four good fellows slain by the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume—on whose head be a million and fifty curses! Then a raid on a chapel near St. Genevieve."

"Ayha!—a raid. Good."

"By the horns of the moon! I am weary. But it has paid; for I have put in prison Madame Elise, *et devant* Baronne Cosgnac, and also, Mademoiselle Pearlina, her daughter, or adopted daughter—no matter. Madame Elise will be guillotined to-morrow at noon, on Place de la Revolution. She is at the Conciergerie. The other is at the Luxembourg, for special disposition by Captain Poilet St. Liege."

Jean Valasque would have exclaimed:

"Ayha! I am glad to hear that! Death to all of the nobility! I hate them!"

But he remembered that the dread avenger was close at hand, beneath the cot, and even the presence of Sergeant Killer might not prevent the punishment of instant death for such a speech.

"My duties are well ended for the night, friend Jean," pursued John Killer, wiping the perspiration from his head until his unkempt hair stood out in tangled rumples, like a miniature oat-field after a hurricane. "So, let us have a cosy time at a game of cards. I am determined to beat you, if we have to sit at it until daylight. Get the cards, comrade mine. Also, bring a bottle of wine. We'll have it on yonder low bed, as we have done so often before."

He placed the lamp on the stool, drew the stool near the bed, then plumped himself on the edge of the bed, settling comfortably for the proposed game and a sip of something to drink.

"Sfire and blazes!" spluttered the cary, under his breath. "I am truly in a bad fix which grows worse all the time. I know that Latour de Cosgnac—who is under that bed where the big soldier sits—will split me, head and sole, with his two-edged sword, if he sees me, believing me to be the author of the misfortune which befell madame and the maiden at the chapel; and I also know that this rascal of a soldier would not let me pass the door without treating me to a pistol-shot, because he swore, on the day that I knocked him down with an electric shock from my battery—though the fool insisted, and I gave him double measure—that he would have my life the next time we met. I dare not show myself to either. How, then, I to get out of this uncomfortable hiding? How can Jean Valasque carry out my plans for the release of madame and the maiden, when Latour de Cosgnac has vowed that he will shoot him down the very moment he attempts to leave the house? I dare not execute my threat to blow out his brains for allowing anything to interfere with his departure, as that would betray me. And they intend playing their tomfool card games until daylight. Blazes! This is all very unpleasant."

Valasque was thinking deeply of Paschal Broeck and his threats as he produced the cards from the desk, moved tremblingly to the bed and seated himself reluctantly before the sergeant.

"Hullo, man! you are all in a shake! What ails you, friend Jean?"

"Bad dreams for several nights, sergeant—wonderful bad dreams."

"Ho! Jupiter! we can readily cure that. Come, now, some wine."

"I have none at hand."

"No wine! By the horns of the moon! I never can hold a trump without some wine. Go out and purchase it quickly."

Valasque started in sudden affright.

"No, I cannot go out; I—can—not," he stammered, with chattering teeth.

"Eh? Why, how you tremble. You are, in—"

dead, a sick man. But the wine will remedy that. Hasten and fetch us a bottle or two."

"I cannot do it," declared Valasque, white with horror, and shivering from head to foot.

He had glanced downward, and saw, projecting from under the edge of the counterpane, the shining barrel of a pistol, directly between his legs, pointed full at his face. Another glance at that portion of the clothing against the wall where Paschal Broeck was hiding, discovered a second pistol leveled at his head.

The first pistol plainly meant:

"If you stir a step you die!"

And the second pistol:

"Avail yourself of this chance to obey instructions, or die instantly!"

Jean Valasque closed his eyes, expecting both pistols to bang at once, and within himself he groaned:

"If I go, I am a dead man! If I stay, I am a dead man! One or the other, it is all the same!—and I might as well give up the ghost. I knew that this was to be the last night of my life, the moment I saw Mazgarus, the magician! This is the end of Jean Valasque!"

John Killer, wondering greatly at the trepidation of his companion, as the latter fingered the pack of cards, had detected the second glance cast toward the hanging clothes, and his eyes turned curiously in the same direction. He was not quick enough to observe the protruding pistol; but, dropping his gaze to the bottom of the clothing, he saw a highly-polished gaiter surmounted by a gleaming buckle.

"By the horns of the moon!" he mentally concluded, "there is a man behind those rags. Who? Perhaps I am in a trap!—or a nest of conspirators!—and Jean Valasque does not wish to leave me alone, lest I should poke about and discover something! Oh! Now, I am determined to send him out, and in his absence I may learn that something." Then aloud: "Go for the wine, friend Jean, or I shall blow your head off!" saying which, he drew and pressed an enormous pistol in the ear of Jean Valasque.

The eyes of the terrified man flew open, and he lurched backward from the cot.

"Hold, comrade, hold!" he cried. "I am a dead man, anyhow; so, take pity. Wait. I will go. I am forced to go. Do you hear?"—unnecessarily loud—"I am forced to go for the wine."

He entered the fore part of the store, expecting at every step to receive a bullet in his back. In a few moments he returned equipped from head to foot as a guardsman, and stood in the center of the room with a stare of apathy that showed a resignation to his fate.

"Hullo, friend Jean!—what's this? You are out of sorts and in strange humors to-night," remarked Killer, surprised by the other's change of apparel.

"No matter. Daggers of fire! I am about to fetch us some wine. And I solemnly swear"—loudly, and meant for the ears of Latour—"that I will return to this house without revealing who is now here!"

"Jupiter! You may tell whoever you please!" ejaculated the surprised sergeant. "But, be in a hurry. My throat is dry as a grain-bag."

Jean Valasque stepped out into the night, hardly able to realize that he had escaped the bullet of the Masked Knight. But Latour had reasons for not firing. Having learned, by the speech of Sergeant Killer, that his mother was at the Conciergerie and Pauline at the Luxembourg, he had immediately relinquished the plan that had been his upon entering the office—which was, to go a short distance down the Seine, taking Valasque along, that he might have no opportunity to betray; and after getting rid of him, to return to Paris, and, in the disguise of a fisherman, institute secret methods for ascertaining the exact whereabouts of his loved ones, and striving for their rescue. Knowing, now, where they were—and madened at learning that Madame Elise was to be guillotined on the morrow—he realized how urgent was the necessity for immediate action tending to their relief.

"Now, then," breathed the departing Valasque, relievedly, "I will hasten to perform the wish of Mazgarus—the apothecary, I mean—and try the trick at the Luxembourg first, as that is the nearest. I know, by the mouth of the sergeant, that Mademoiselle Pearlina is there. I will bring her and madame to my shop. Daggers of fire! An awful time will ensue, if Sergeant John Killer remains there until I march in the refugees. But that is no look-out of mine. I will have obeyed the instructions of the apothecary; he must manage the rest at his own risk."

John Killer sat on the edge of the bed, handling his great gun of a pistol and glaring at the bright shoe-buckle against the wall below the jumble of clothing.

"So. Now I will first plug a bullet into the foot under that buckle, lame its owner, then shoot him between the eyes as he comes out."

He raised the pistol and took deliberate aim.

But in the same moment that the sight of the weapon covered the buckle—and as Paschal Broeck was on the point of discharging his own pistol at Sergeant Killer, perceiving his danger

by the latter's movements—a tremendous explosion occurred.

An explosion that shook the second-hand clothing-store of Jean Valasque and everything in it until it fairly rocked from roof to cellar.

Simultaneous with the explosion, a knotted ball of clothing sped like a shot, from the middle doorway, dashing the lamp into a myriad pieces. And as the light went out, and while the building quivered in the shock of the explosion, Sergeant Killer felt the cot and himself forced up into the air, turning over and falling with a crash, casting him sprawling on the floor amid a mass of slats, frame and bedding which held him flat upon his stomach.

"By the horns of the moon!" he bellowed, as the pistol exploded in his hand, and he struggled like a netted bull in the debris of the cot. "Hol Jupiter! It is judgment-day, and I am on the road to perdition!"

For immediately succeeding the explosion, a red glare lighted up his surrounding, showing that the front portion of the store of Jean Valasque was in flames.

CHAPTER XXII.

QUATORIN'S ASSASSINS.

THE junk clothier, leaving the store by that door at the rear office, was compelled to pursue a somewhat roundabout course in order to gain one end of that court of infamies known as the Assassins' Causeway.

And never before did Jean Valasque have such a narrow escape from death as on that occasion when he hurried forward through the darkness, though he was unaware of the fact.

There were many pairs of eyes fixed upon his retreating figure, peering from behind boxes and barrels, from the shadow of doorways—for the second-hand clothing store backed upon an alley too narrow, too black and too sleepily inhabited to have merited a name, being impenetrable to the gaze as a pit at midnight and silent as the grave.

Totally unconscious of his peril—which will be shown anon—he hurried on with swinging strides, without stumble or hesitation, his knowledge of the place assuring safety of action as well by night as by day; and this familiarity was most requisite now, as heavy clouds were crawling and banking across the sky, filling the murky air with a damp scent of coming rain.

Soon he entered the Assassins' Causeway, coming upon a surrounding in striking contrast with the crooked, uncertain, tomb-like alley he had left; a straight, half-brilliant court, beginning at the back building of *Cafe Melange*, and running the length of a block.

It was tolerably paved and cobbled—very narrowly paved, however, and with a succession of low steps projecting to the almost-imperceptible curb.

Few people were to be seen. But at every dozen steps the pedestrian encountered a light, red, green, yellow or tri-color, erected out upon the border of the cobbles, indicating the entrance to a drinking saloon.

The disposition of the French, forever gay, even in the midst of calamity, prevailed to the last degree among the class of frequenters at these saloons in the Assassins' Causeway. The terror of the times seemed naught to them; mirth, revelry, ribald songs and coarse shouts murmured and monotoned beyond the lighted entrances, where men and women drank to drunkenness, sung in frenzies, laughed or fought, contented with that excitement born of lowest proclivities.

Paris was once noted in history for its dirty streets, and the Assassins' Causeway might be rated as a fair sample of earlier neglect, with its mud, offal and foul smells.

Picking his way as if afraid of treading upon vermin, and thudding his pike-butt at every step, Jean Valasque approached a certain light—a red light before a liquor-shop where more men had been stabbed to death than at any other saloon.

"If I can find at once the rogue I want," his thick lips mused, half aloud, "I can then push this job in a hurry. With the bag of gold in my trousers-pocket, given to me by Paschal Broeck—and which I was, fortunately, quick enough to conceal before admitting the Masked Knight—I can very easily get half a dozen men to look and act ugly and accurately enough to deceive the guards at the Luxembourg. Daggers of fire! It is a perilous game that I am compelled to play to satisfy the grim humor of infernal Mazgarus, the—apothecary, I mean. Here I am. And rumpus enough there is, too, in this beastly den. I have generally avoided it, when I drink."

He threw open the door and paused just inside to glance around.

A room fairly blazing with light; long, broad, having a low, smoked ceiling.

There were a number of chairs and tables, all occupied by gamblers and games at cards, dice, dominoes and other modes of amusement for money; goblets and cups rattled and jingled; vulgar songs, chorusing voices, oaths of quarreling, chattering women, crowds of lookers-on; and the faces of the assemblage, men and women, scarred, blinking, cunning, sotted, all

formed a picture as of a numerous group of criminals, thirsty, wolfish, daring, ready to stab, rob, betray or murder—as were most of those who reigned supreme in their disgusting and bloody vices within the precincts of the Assassins' Causeway.

At sight of a guardsman on the threshold, all sounds ceased as suddenly as if each tongue were frozen in its throat, for the first thought of all was:

"This soldier is a stranger. Why is he here? What can Commune or Committee want among such as we are?"

But the lull was for an instant only. A hoarse, jerky voice cried:

"Hal! hal! it is Jean Valasque—as merry a *garcon* as ever swallowed *un doigt de vin*! Hal! comrade!"

And the sounds of gabble, song and dispute were resumed, while the wine-glasses clashed afresh.

"Ayha! The very man I seek!" exclaimed Valasque, internally and with satisfaction. "Leave off that game, Quatorin," he said, beckoning to the man who had hailed him. "I have something to say to you."

Precisely in the same moment that Jean Valasque spoke, and as he beckoned to the swarthy ruffian whom he addressed as Quatorin, the ears of all within the animated room were startled by that loud, reverberating explosion which occurred at the front entrance to the second-hand clothing store on Rue du Cliftonier, and because of its nearness and severity produced a tremor and rattle of window-panes throughout the entire length of the Assassins' Causeway.

All started to their feet; several rushed forth to ascertain the meaning of the noise; a few cried:

"The alarm gun has bursted! Look out for the barriers!"

Amid the scene of sudden and general confusion, Jean Valasque laid hold upon the shoulder of villainous visaged Quatorin, and as they were forced outward among others in the jam about the door he whispered something in the vagabond's ear, which caused the latter to exclaim:

"Hal! So! Very good. I am ready. Where is the gold?"

"There must be no touching of liquor, mind you," continued Valasque, as he jingled a handful of coin into the other's palm. "None but sober men must engage in this business, Quatorin."

"Oh, never fear on that score! With half an eye it is easy to see the necessity of being clear-headed. Come, now."

With a readiness that showed an organized discipline among a particular portion of the semi-barbarous denizens of the Assassins' Causeway, and by means of signaling whistles and calls, Quatorin, who was a prominent leader of a gang of wretches like himself—soon collected half a score of grotesque and reckless characters, to whom he imparted the desires of Jean Valasque.

Then these men, with Valasque and Quatorin at their head, started on a run toward the Luxembourg.

The Causeway was in a fever of excitement. The customers of all the saloons had come swarming and reeling forth at the sound of the terrific explosion; windows were thrown up and filled with faces gazing curiously down upon the men congregated and gabbling around and under the lights of the rum-shops. And while those half-score rascals followed Valasque and Quatorin at a double-quick pace in the direction of the Luxembourg, and as the small crowds gazed wonderingly after them, the heavens were suddenly illuminated by the flames of the burning store on Rue du Cliftonier, at which point another scene of excitement was in progress.

Valasque, encouraged by the presence of his disreputable acquaintances, boldly presented himself at the Luxembourg and demanded the surrender of the person of Mademoiselle Pearlina.

"That lady is the express prisoner of Captain Poilet St. Liege, who is to conduct the charge against her. We cannot give her up," he was informed.

"Ayha! very true; as you say, she is the prisoner of St. Liege. And by him we are ordered to take her into the street and—well, you can guess the rest. Daggers of fire! Read that! Death to all aristocrats!"

"Death to aristocrats!" chorused the assassins, pressing around Valasque.

"Read that order. And if you do not deliver up the person of Mademoiselle Pearlina, *adieu*! I shall act upon its authority and drag you out also!" threatened Valasque, with a boastful flourish, as he delivered his supposed legal right to enforce the demand.

It was one of the notes cunningly contrived and forged by the apothecary, bearing the signature of Poilet St. Liege in admirable imitation.

"I obey the order of the captain," bowed the man who had challenged and disputed with Jean Valasque.

A turnkey with a flambeau was summoned, who led the way, followed with every appearance of British eagerness by Valasque and Quatorin. The group of assassins who had accompanied the two, remained below.

"We must be quick," whispered the fat and disguised clothes-dealer, "or our heads may be chopped off for this exploit!"

"Ay, very quick. Faster, there, turnkey! Let us get hold once upon this female aristocrat, who seems to have no other name than Mademoiselle Pearlina!"

Of all the horrid tableaux of gore which history has accurately painted in the record of the French Revolution, none can exceed the deeds of violence perpetrated by a people transformed to assassins, drunk with blood and paid at the rate of so much per head, as it were, by the Municipal Committee, for those brutal and public sacrifices and mutilations at *La Force*, the *Bleue Abbaye*, and other prisons in Paris, where neither age nor sex were any protection from frantic and demoniac butcheries by wild men and still wilder women—worse than the cannon-mouth massacres conceived by Collet d'Herbois, or the sword in the hands of an executioner who frequently failed to decapitate until the third or fourth hacking stroke.

Mobs at all times are a terrible element: more so at a time when the country is shaken and decimated by the artillery of a foreign and invading foe, and a home government, criminally bloody itself, incapable of controlling the masses by either force or favor. And the constant mobs of the Revolution swept upon all in their insane fury, till the corridors of the prisons, public courts and squares, even the patrolled Seine, ached and groaned with the dying gasps of slaughtered beings whom the populace considered as having too long escaped trial and death.

The victims of the sword and guillotine, and the victims of assassination, formed at last a tragedy of such a sickening spectacle, and filled the minds of still surviving prisoners with such tortures of contemplation, that these fought for their dungeons, chains and starvation rather than the brutal doom impending.

To be confronted by the frightful prospect of such a fate, at the hands of such a mob, was new in store for Pearlina.

The turnkey flung wide her door, and waving his flambeau ahead, cried:

"Behold her—the aristocrat! Out with her! Let her die the death of a dog, and be shot, piecemeal, from a cannon muzzle! Down with all aristocrats and the proteges of the nobility!"

Quatorin and Valasque immediately advanced and grasped the maiden, who stood petrified with terror. Remembrance of the recent victim, dragged out when Pollet St. Liege was wooing her with his cruel threats, and the words now uttered by the inhuman turnkey, left no doubt as to the portent of this visit.

As the rude hands gripped her arms a despairing shriek rung from her lips. "No!—no! I am not to die thus—I cannot! Send for Captain St. Liege! I am promised life at least until tomorrow! Mercy! Heaven help!—mercy!"

"Daggers of fire!" snorted Valasque, as he and Quatorin forced her from the cell. "Daggers of fire! stop your cat-mouth and this resistance, or you shall not live long enough to reach the street!"

"Come, then, I shall carry you!" snarled Quatorin, lifting her in his muscular arms and bearing her away.

She shrieked and struggled vainly. Valasque followed closely, indulging in fierce gesticulations. A hundred faces were pressed to the bars of the adjoining cells to sorrowfully witness the departure of this last new victim for hanger, bullet or spear.

But suddenly the screams ceased, and as Quatorin rejoined his fellows at the entrance she lay white, limp, swooning in his arms. His appearance was greeted by a shout, and one of the men threw a large blanket over his insensible burden, covering her completely.

The faint was not the result of overpowering dread in view of expected assassination. As he carried her, shaking her and simulating anger at her resistance, Quatorin placed his foul lips close to the maiden's ear and hissed:

"Be still, you great fool! We are not to kill but to rescue you; and by no other means can it be done. Believe this, for it is true. In a short time you will be free!"

This announcement, under the great strain of mind, having such a keen and indescribable effect, brought instant unconsciousness upon her, and in that condition, and with a yell of triumph, the assassins bore her away from the Luxembourg.

Going a short distance, Valasque paused beneath a lantern and called one of the ruffians to his side.

"Deliver this to Captain St. Liege at his headquarters without delay—hold! I have an addition to make," and ripping open one end of the billet with his hanger—another of those hastily written by the apothecary—he scribbled that postscript which added to the wonderment of St. Liege when he received it soon afterward; for the head-quarters of the captain being situated between the Luxembourg and the Concier-

gerie, very little time was required to deliver the missive sent by Valasque.

The purpose of the apothecary in luring St. Liege to the back office of the second-hand clothing store the reader may divine by what has previously transpired to show the unquenchable hate and sworn vendetta existing between all men of the blood of Bonville and St. Liege—the true name of Paschal Broeck being Hural Bonville, as he declared during that journey underground from Castle de Cosnac to the chapel near St. Genevieve.

"Quatorin, give to me that delicious burden you are carrying. Here is the bag of gold I pledged. Hasten, you and the rest, to the Conciergerie, and accomplish for Madame Elise de Cosnac what we have already done for her adopted daughter, Mademoiselle Pearlina. Bring her to my store. You will not fail!"

"There can be no failure with such liberal pay. I am off."

When Pearlina regained her senses she was in the arms of fat and burly Jean Valasque.

"Ay! you have come around, have you?" he exclaimed, placing her at once upon her feet.

"Do I dream? And have I indeed been spared?" murmured the bewildered Pearlina.

"Daggers of fire! Rub your eyes! You are awake, I think. Draw that blanket closer about your person and fashion a hood for yourself. Step fast. We are not so safe yet, and my neck itches unpleasantly after the danger I have incurred in your behalf."

"Whoever you are, receive the heart-deep thanks of a grateful woman—"

"Splish! I have only done my duty." Adding, inwardly: "And I hope have saved my head from the vengeance of Mazgarus, the apothecary, I mean. Why will I forever be thinking of a name which chills my marrow! Ay! I am expecting a grand time when Mademoiselle Pearlina walks in to confront the man who captured her this very night and locked her up in prison. Oh! a merry time, with the apothecary, the sergeant, and the masked knight who is a champion of all who are chased by the Committee! Depend upon it, my nose will be very much in the background when all these meet. Indeed, since my store will become so prominent thereby, I think I had better make sure of my money and clear out. My precious money! With it, I can get out of Paris and still be a very rich man."

"Whither are you leading me?" asked Pearlina.

"Away from the Luxembourg. Is not that enough? Rely upon me. Come; faster. Eh! Ay! There is another fire ahead. They will burn down all Paris if this tumult continues. Courage, mademoiselle—lovely mademoiselle! I am Jean Valasque, your friend, and a very honorable dealer in old clothes on Rue du Chiffonier. Ah! it seems to me that fire is somewhere near my place of business. Faster, mademoiselle."

While Valasque was conducting Pearlina forward, Quatorin and his assassins hurried to the Conciergerie.

"We come for the body of Madame Elise, citizen Baronne de Cosnac. Here is my authority," he announced, boldly entering the prison.

But before the officer in charge could read the forged order, which Quatorin presented, and just as the ruffian finished his demand for Madame Elise, there was a clatter of hoof strokes and a messenger—the messenger of Pollet St. Liege—reined up his horse at the entrance.

This comer, throwing himself from the saddle, rushed forward, shouting:

"Seize these men—all! That order is a forgery! A trick to rescue Madame Elise!"

As he had fully completed the last sentence, he fell to the ground, pierced by several sharp hangers, and the assassins, scattering, escaped in various directions.

Quatorin was not so fortunate. Being further within the entrance, he was surrounded, seized and bound before he could strike a blow or make a movement to escape.

"The curse of the devil forever upon Jean Valasque and his gold!" exclaimed the unlucky villain between his teeth. "I am a doomed man, and have only the consolation of knowing that the last act of my life was intended to be a charitable one!"

"What's that you are mumbling?" interrogated one of the turnkeys.

Quatorin maintained a dogged and scowling silence as he was led away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRACKED BY THE MOB.

LATOUR DE COSNAC and the three young noblemen emerged unscathed from that contest on the quay stairs described in Chapter XV—assaulting the mob with such fury and excellent swordsmanship that a path was cleared and widened, and the cries of the wounded and fleeing told how terribly effective was the onslaught of those who had at first been merely defending their lives.

A track of death was hewn before the irresistible sweeps of the mighty two edged sword, and the three who followed Latour, lunging,

cutting and pricking to the right side and the left side, prevented the demoniacal and continually augmenting horde from closing on their rear.

"Down with the nobility! Death to all aristocrats!" were the cries and mad yelps of those who foolishly fought and fell before the four invincible and swift-gleaming swords.

It is seldom that a mob is formidably armed otherwise than with stones and clubs, or other unreliable weapons grasped up at random in the impulse of the moment, though both arms and ammunition, during the Revolution, were in plenty among all rioters, their principal weapons, however, through the pillage-preaching of Carra, in '89, being pikes. A riot here had not been expected, and but a few carried arms. This disadvantage, coupled to the fact that the *gens d'armes* had fled at the first charge of the Masked Knight, knowing of and fearing his prowess, and the sight of so many dropping like timber blocks at the teeth of a buzz-saw, soon struck panic into the breast of the boldest, resulting in the almost incredible scene of scores of athletic men and screeching women retreating and terrified before the four swords of four determined foes.

"Follow me! This way!" panted the young champion, dashing down the quay stairs. "Our best escape, friends, lies in this direction. Hasten! I am sick with seeing blood!"

He quickly gained the spot where we saw him sink the small boat in our first chapter, and pulling at the rope attached to its prow, soon had the light craft afloat, when ready hands bailed the water from it in a few minutes. Seizing the oars, which were locked to the thwart, the four pushed off, and the boat, with its heavy load, moved toward the opposite shore, receiving a harmless shower of missiles as it departed.

"Lend me a jacket, one of you," requested Latour, doffing his cap with the white plume and placing it under the seat. "I must cover my steel vest, or it will betray us to the patrol; and there has been enough bloodshed to-night, though, God knows, it could not be helped."

Though the burning castle and the unmistakable commotion of battle on the quay was attracting the attention of every living thing upon the Seine in that immediate vicinity, and the broad glare of light upon the water made a prominent object of the receding boat, de Cosnac and his companions were fortunate enough to reach the shore without being challenged.

Arriving at that point where, under the guidance of the apothecary's servant, Perrue, he had escaped from the Catacombs, Latour led the others into the depth of the black, round, burrow-like opening.

"My friend," he said, "we are just now in a plight, for we cannot leave this place without certainly being recognized. Near the corner of the second cross-street, before reaching the Boulevard, there is a tailor's shop. Let him who is least likely to be detected and known repair thither and bring us hats and cloaks. The owner is an aged man, a very good soul, who will readily leave his bed to oblige a customer."

It was when this had been done, that the four, with broad-brimmed hats and cloaks draping to the heel, started for the establishment of Jean Valasque. For, fixing upon this destination, Latour explained as they went:

"We can there obtain a few hours' rest and purchase disguises as fishermen—a very safe garb for us to assume, I am sure. Then we must strive to aid my mother and Pearlina, whose fate, alas! I fear to be the worst."

"In the dress of a fisherman, Monsieur Latour, you will not be able to wear your sword. How shall we ever get along if deprived of the sword of De Cosnac?"

"I can still have my dagger and pistols. They must answer."

But the night was to be one long remembered by the characters surviving this story, and the four brave men were not to escape so easily from all consequences of the affray on the quay.

There was one personage who had never for an instant lost sight of them since the moment that her husband fell by the sword of De Cosnac; the wife, or mistress, of Marcus Baptiste, the pikeman—a tall, gaunt female of fiendish mien and bare, hairy arms, who carried a long iron rod.

She had marked their course by the light of the blazing castle, and rightly guessed when they landed, that they had taken refuge in the opening to the inclined plane leading down to the Catacombs.

Filled with rage at the death of Marcus Baptiste, her lord and master, and smarting for vengeance on the man who had slain him, she darted about among the routed mob that was now reassembling, haranguing them with all the interjections of a not-over-moral tongue.

So that, by the time the four, in their disguising cloaks and hats, came from the sheltering darkness of the entrance to the Catacombs, this fiend-faced virago, Bezel, the mistress of Marcus Baptiste, had crossed the bridge, followed and backed by a small concourse who had rallied at her exhortations, in eager but silent pursuit of the hated noblesse.

On went the voiceless but bloodthirsty crowd,

whose proximity and intent was not long unknown to the pursued.

"We shall follow these accursed aristocrats—for such I am sure they are—to their den," harshly whined the amazon Bezbel; "and there, if we cannot whip them, we will find another way to destroy them. Vengeance for Marcus Baptiste! Baster. They have marked our coming and—see—they quicken their pace!"

"HALT!" challenged the leader of a small patrol that wheeled sharp around a corner and stopped before the rioters with bayonets at a charge.

"Stand aside, there!" yelled the cracked, rasping voice of Bezbel. "We are the people! And we are hunting the aristocrats!"

She shattered a musket at one stroke of the iron bar in her hand and strode onward, the crowd pushing and jostling close in her rear.

"Recover! Right-about! Ready! Aim! Fire!" ordered the leader of the patrol, which had been dispatched to ascertain the cause of the fire and disturbance on Isle St. Louis.

"Forward!" screamed Bezbel, as a volley from the muskets rained upon the throng—several of whom toppled over lifeless on the pavement and she started on a run, being promptly imitated by her followers, all vanishing in the next street before the soldiers could reload.

"But that I am on a special errand to Isle St. Louis," exclaimed the patrolman, with an oath, "I would chase that mob and blow it to pieces!"

Latour and his friends sped on, endeavoring to elude their pursuers, and finally, after many turnings, they entered the dark alley at the rear of the shop on Rue du Chiffonier and gained access to the dingy private office of Jean Valasque.

The bang of the door closing after them shut out, with its noise, the single exultant shout that issued from the mouth of Bezbel, who, in advance of the rest, had been in time to observe, by a momentary and dull stream of light, the opening and closing of the door.

"Hal hal!" she laughed, coarsely, and flourishing the iron bar. "Oul oul here is the end of the trail. They are in the little hole-of-an-office of the rag-clothes man, Jean Valasque, with whom I have bargained for many a garment. Go, some of you, up that way and watch. Stab or shoot the first man who puts foot outside that office! And some, to the front with me. The hated noblesse are in there. Hal hal we shall soon find a way to force an entrance, and then I may avenge my poor Baptiste—I loved him much, for all he was a deceiving villain. Come—to the front!"

And while a few skulked forward into the alley, the remainder hastened to the front of the building, led by the wild woman, Bezbel, in whose brain a devilish purpose was revolving, based upon a certain knowledge she possessed regarding the establishment of Jean Valasque.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EXPLOSION.

BEZBEL, the mistress of Marcus Baptiste, was a veritable tigress dominating in the quarter where she resided, noted for temper, strength, cruelty and vindictiveness, and both admired and feared by that low, outlawed class which formed her surrounding.

None were more ferocious than she in the massacres and brutal assassinations the blood of which stained, with lasting disgrace to the government, the court of *Abbaye* beyond the horrible wicket of death.

Her eyes now rolled in impish gloarings as, having seen to the guarding of the rear door, she led her vociferous crew to the front of the store of Jean Valasque, planning, the while, upon that method for the destruction of the men who had slain her acknowledged lord, by a certain means the existence and facility of which she was aware of through many visits and curious peepings at the shop, where she had been a frequent customer for the purchase or disposal of garments as her exchequer admitted or demanded alternately.

Latour, then, was quite correct in saying to Jean Valasque, when within the dimly-lighted office, indicating himself and his friends:

"We think that we have been pursued."

The giant, Sergeant Killer, was entering the alley from the opposite end at the moment that Bezbel and her horde were moving around to the front, and he reached the narrow door of the rear office before the skulking figures detached by the virago arrived in his vicinity.

The ticklish escape of Valasque, before alluded to, as he started ostensibly to procure the bottle of wine for thirsty Sergeant Killer—but, in reality, to carry out the plans and commands of the man he had known and served and treacherously stabbed, at a former period, as Mazzarus the magician—was at the hands of these assassin-rioters ordered by Bezbel to guard the rear exit and kill the first man who put foot outside of the door; for instantly upon the appearance of the junk clothes dealer, a number of fists, clinched on knives and clubs, were outstretched to pierce his body and thump his head—to be withdrawn, however, as the momentary flicker of light across the threshold discovered him to be, notwithstanding his disguise, the fat rogue, Jean

Valasque, whom they well knew, and against whom they held no enmity.

The secret of the store which the fiend woman, Bezbel, possessed, was that Jean Valasque, at the time of his prominence in the early mobs of the Revolution, had collected several kegs of powder and a storage of arms and accoutrements, such as pikes, pistols, daggers, muskets, swords, even a pile of cannon balls captured at one of the barriers, besides a mass of combustibles in the shape of rockets, fuses, mortars and Roman candles used by the naval signal service: all these in the convenient cellar.

It was the intention of the infuriate Bezbel, with these kegs of powder, to blow up the store and everything in it, reckless of consequences, though she made no open boast of it.

By a dexterous application of the iron bar in her sinewy fingers, she wrenched off the padlock of the door, and, accompanied by two men, bearing torches, descended to the cellar.

But, if she had known that, at one time, Jean Valasque kept a considerable quantity of powder stowed below, she was not aware of the fact that it had since been nearly wholly disposed of at a profitable sale, and the last remnant of the dangerous stock consisted of a small canister—this canister open, because Valasque had sold a pound of it that very day.

"Hal it is all gone save that one canister!" was her whispered exclamation of disappointment. "Bring it up, though—that lot of powder. With it we can blow open the door and get at that hated nobility who have killed my Baptiste. What care I, if Jean Valasque goes up with the rest, since he harbors such people who ought to be dead long ago! Come. Bring the canister quickly as possible—and hold these torches a safe distance from it."

The three young noblemen concealed in the cellar were attracted by the probing and straining at the padlock and stout hasp of the entrance over the door and the sullen mutterings of the crowd without. Imagining that the place was about to be attacked front and rear, and preferring to fight by the side of De Cosgnac, who, they thought, must be menaced by danger equal to their own, they determined to rejoin their young chief.

While one remained a step or two below the top of the trap, the others, by their united efforts, forced up the trap and the heap of clothing which weighed it down, and noiselessly gained the main store.

The two, glancing around the door-jamb, observed that the only apparent occupant of the room was the burly Sergeant Killer—who was acting so mysteriously with his heavy pistol—and there were no signs of foes other than

"Our escape," breathed one, in the ear of the other, "must be opened here; for, evidently, the front of the store is attacked either by the patrol or those who pursued us hither. Monsieur Latour must be somewhere near and will duly join us. Make a knot of clothing from that pile there. We will knock out the light of the lamp and overcome this soldier. If he resists, he must not be spared. Then warn the Comte, on the step, to join us in our dash."

Latour, prostrate beneath the cot, had resolved immediately upon the departure of Valasque:

"I will overthrow this bearded hog who sits on the bed, call my friends and leave without delay. Pearlina and my mother are confined at the Luxembourg and the Conciergerie, and I must be expeditious with some scheme for their rescue—which I shall never be able to do in this position. Now, then, for action."

It was in the same second that one of the young nobles threw the knotted ball of clothes which shattered the lamp—and as Latour, with a great exertion of his wonderful muscle, raised the cot with his shoulders and precipitated the sergeant to the floor—and as the two men, at the order of Bezbel, started to pick up the powder canister—and as another of the young nobles called to their companion to aid in the capture of the soldier—that the last noble, standing on the steps near the top of the trap, levelled and fired his pistol upon those who had entered at the front of the cellar.

All simultaneous, as if by preconcerted signal.

And the shot from the pistol, striking one of the torches, knocked the blazing brand squarely into the open powder canister, producing that explosion which blew to pieces Bezbel and her two companions, burst open the doors and windows by fearful concussion, toppled out the wall of the office, rocked the whole premises and lighted the other masses of explosive rockets, etc., soon communicating sparks to the combustible timbers and stock of the store and filling the ruins with flames, smoke and sulphurous smell.

The unfortunate young noble who fired the shot was dashed to death against the stone foundation.

The wall behind Paschal Broeck gave way, and the apothecary was lifted and cast reeling out into the night, his pistol exploding and wounding the great snake around his body, which caused the reptile to drop from his person and dart into the glare of the flames, coiling,

twisting, and beating the floor in its contortions of pain and anger.

The two young nobles were hurled, spinning like tops, forward into the office, alarmed but unhurt.

Latour, brought to his knees by the quaking of the building, remained thus, with his fingers gripping the shaggy hair of the prostrate and bellowing sergeant.

And then the mob, not dreaming of the death of Bezbel and the others, but deeming this a part of her method for the capture or destruction of the hated noblesse—though there were wounds and maimings among them from the showers of fragments and splinters—uttered mad yells and charged with one rush, entering the openings front and rear, and clambering in at the bursted windows, the tenor of their cries being:

"Down with the nobility! Death to aristocrats! Vengeance for Marcus Baptiste! Live Bezbel!"

CHAPTER XXV.

VALASQUE AND PEARLINE.

PEARLINE could not but be aware that she owed her present liberty and the promise of its continuance to a bold and hazardous plot, the head actor in which was her conductor. Yet there was that in the whining harshness of his voice and the freedom of manner with which he plucked at her arm—as he endeavored by word and action to quicken her movements—which created an instant repugnance of feeling for him.

Apprehending that the large fire then in progress was near his store, and alarmed for the safety of his treasured money more than all the stock, should such prove to be the case, he was pulling the maiden forward at a painful speed; for she was quite weak with the mental and bodily fatigue endured since the opening chapters of our story.

"Monsieur Valasque," she begged, "can we not go slower, or seek some smoother or better lighted route? My slippers—very thin of make—are near worn through and this rough path is bruising me unmercifully."

"Mind it not; but hasten. Ample time for nursing the bruises, under the care of Paschal Broeck, the apothecary, who is well versed in the treatment of all such ailments."

"Paschal Broeck!" Pearlina stood still. "It cannot be possible that you are leading me to him?"

"Ayha! Paschal Broeck is a very clever man—clever as Paschal Broeck, the apothecary, I mean. To him, or his humor, you owe your liberty."

"To him!"

"Even so: he planned it—I risked my neck at it. Your mother will also escape from the Conciergerie—where she is, by the way, sentenced to the block for to-morrow—and join us at my store, if we are fortunate enough to get there. Oh, I have good reasons to state that Paschal Broeck would do you no harm."

"You jest. It cannot be that Paschal Broeck would incur this last danger to aid—and yet"—to herself, as she moved on again at his side—"he seemed to be very much interested in me and in those I love. Now that I have time to think, I recall a sentence he uttered in the tapestried chamber of the castle, which intimated that he knows and can prove who I am. It was this: 'If she is the person I have long suspected her to be, I expect to reap a rich reward by aiding her in establishing herself.' If I am valuable to some scheme of his, then it is natural that he should not wish me ill—"

"I have no doubt," broke in Valasque, "that Paschal Broeck has, by this time, contrived a plan to insure your safety from the hands of Sergeant John Killer, the giant pikeman," still pushing ahead, with his gaze turned to the lurid glare.

"Sergeant Killer! How from him? You mean the soldier giant?"

"The same," half absently. "He, too, is at my store, having a long wait for a bottle of wine which I am to bring him."

A second time Pearlina halted.

"Monsieur Valasque, what manner of man are you? The man you speak of is a tool of Captain Poilet St. Liege, my persecutor. Would you take me from prison, at such peril to yourself, only that I may be cast into it again by a most wicked enemy? I will go no further. Leave me here, and I will trust to God, the friend of the innocent and oppressed, to guide my footsteps. Go your way. I would as soon die here as to fall into the hands of that great beast!"

"Daggers of fire. Come on, I say. There is another at my store who, I warrant, will protect you from both the apothecary and the sergeant. Oh, I have entertained a various and singular company, before my trip to the Luxembourg. There will be merry times, shortly, at the store of Jean Valasque—if that is not it I see burning. Who, you ask? Ayah! the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume. You may have heard of him as the mysterious champion and avenger of that large nobility which the Revolution has been breaking up by

means of perpetual guillotine. A rare fellow—a mighty fellow, forsooth!"

Pearline could scarce repress a cry.

"The masked knight! You tell me that he is there, waiting for me? You know him then?—and why I, of all persons, would be protected by him?"

"Whether he awaits you or not, he is there. Know him?—yes, as a breaker of heads and slasher with a sword." Adding to himself: "And I am certain, by the creeping round my heart and the nightmare of my brain, that Mazgarus, the magician, or the masked knight, one of the two, will yet, and soon, be the death of Jean Valasque." And aloud: "Come—faster. Believe me, you will find an able friend, Pearl-line Horstmarck, at my store."

"Pearline Horstmarck! What name is that?" exclaimed the maiden, in surprise.

"Whose but your own, beautiful made-moiselle?"

"My own! Pearl-line Horstmarck! Heavens! then you, monsieur, a stranger, know who I am?"

"Ayha! none better. Who but Pearl-line Horstmarck, daughter of Count Andrew, of Germany, and Cybele St. Liege, of Seville. But I forgot; you could not know, nor could any one tell you, for the package sent to Madame Elise—which the apothecary spoke of to me—was not to be opened until your twentieth birthday, seven days hence. Nevertheless, I tell you that you are the true, lawful, and only child of Count Andrew Horstmarck and Cybele St. Liege. I may as well give away the secret, since it is no longer of service to me. You are, therefore, of noble blood. Perhaps that—and more because the lineage is German, and France has no love for Germany just now—is the chief reason for your persecution, unless you know of further cause."

"The packet! The packet!" murmured Pearl-line, half-aloud. "Ah! I remember; it was in the private casket-desk belonging to Madame Elise. She gave the casket to Paschal Broeck when she ascended the ladder at the chapel near St. Genevieve. Madame and I were seized and carried off from the rest. I did not see the casket again. Paschal Broeck, I am sure, must have it."

"Ayha! Paschal Broeck has the casket, you say! Then he has all—everything; for only this night he obtained possession of two very important papers, in addition to the packet, which also contains the original of the last will and testament of Count Andrew: the certificates of your mother's marriage and your birth. So, you must look to him for the means to establish your identity, and I have no doubt that he will demand a big price for that small and easy job. Curse him for robbing me, this night, of that same good-fortune!" the last in his soul.

A moment's ecstasy thrilled Pearl-line, as she thought, while now gladly following the guidance of Jean Valasque:

"Oh, Latour! My very own! If what this man says be true, and not the delirium of a suspicion, then I can give you my hand without a blush and repose in your heart forever! Farewell to days of thirsty and unsated love! Away with all cruel barriers of the past! And if my lifelong ardor can suffice, it shall be yours, all yours, to repay your patient trust and sweet devotion. Joy! Oh, joy!"

Even eagerly, now, she hastened on over the rough, dark route which Jean Valasque selected because of its being less frequented at all times. A sudden sensation of bliss possessed her, roused by the gruff-spoken declarations of this man, as she seemed to see obliterated the chasm she had felt it her duty to interpose between her heart and Latour, in her long uncertainty of birth.

"Should Paschal Broeck demand all that I may ever be entitled to," she meditated, "I will yield it cheerfully, so long as I gain a proud, unspotted name, to make me worthy of the love of my Latour!"

Jean Valasque would have chosen a much more circuitous way to approach his store, to insure escaping observation and remark, had his mind not been so intent with the light of the fire ahead—an illumination that seemed to spread with rapidity, as if four or five buildings were ablaze instead of one.

As the bright glare increased till the lamp-black depths of the storm-gathering clouds were like a vast canopy of billowing crimson his fears redoubled for the safety of his store and the large quantity of money hidden there.

For the money being counted by the rag-clothes dealer, when first introduced to the reader, by no means comprised the whole of his miserly and ill-gotten accumulations. A considerable and recurring residue of the pillages, spoliations, rapines, secured by those mobs among whom he had figured earlier in the Revolution, a large share of which fell to him, he had soon converted into both hard and paper money. This money was packed and buried in the long cellar under his tunnel-like establishment.

A destruction of his premises would be, to Jean Valasque, the loss of more wealth than any one had ever dreamed of; and it was natural that, seeing the conflagration so near his lo-

cation—the flames now shooting and tonguing upward high amid seas of sparks that floated and rolled away in airs pregnant with the smell of cotton and woolen stuffs—a dread should enter his close and avaricious heart while striding along and staring at the brilliant and ominous outburst ahead.

With eyes fixed, unswerving and startled, upon the reflection of the fire, his fat body swinging and lumbering forward, and seeming to forget the maiden at his side, he did not perceive three figures that wheeled around a corner in front, nor knew of their proximity until a familiar and feared voice exclaimed:

"By the stars! Here is Jean Valasque! Halt, there, rag-man! Who is that with you?—a female, I see. Did I not promise to bore you with a bullet if you dared to leave your shop?"

Valasque stopped short and nearly leaped into the air, as if a rapier-point had pricked his breast, and every bristling hair of his head stood on end.

"Ayha! Ho! Daggers of fire! The Masked Knight!" he spluttered, and took to his heels at a speed surprising for one of his obesity.

"Latour! Latour!" cried Pearl-line, casting herself upon the foremost figure, as she caught the last words of fleeing and startled Valasque.

"Pearline!" gasped Latour, in astonishment, folding his arms around the trembling form of the maiden. "In the name of heaven!—what means this? See, gentlemen; she was with that scoundrel, Jean Valasque—his prisoner for some evil purpose. Remain with her, while I pursue and flay the wretch! Ah! she has fainted—and Valasque is gone."

Pearline lay a dead weight on his arm, the blanket falling from her and revealing that she had swooned.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EVENTS OF MIDNIGHT.

As the wall of the back office fell outward, and a portion of the roof caved inward, and Paschal Broeck was hurled, as if from a mortar, against the opposite walls of the alley—and as the shrieking assassins at the rear charged over the debris, and the mob at the front came in through doors and windows with those curdling yells for vengeance upon the nobles—who had slain Marcus Baptiste—the apothecary scrambled to his feet, bruised, but not seriously hurt, and stared in blank amazement at the ruins, the horde of howling rioters darting like demons about the rubbish and in beyond, and listened to the succession of reports and hissings caused by the fire-works exploding their resonant volleys in the cellar and zig-zagging in all directions, igniting everything of a combustible material.

"Blazes of flume!" he interjected, thoroughly astonished. "That was a most novel manner to be extricated from my unpleasant predicament! Somebody has blown up the shop of Jean Valasque. And I will not be surprised if all in it a moment since—the sergeant, the Masked Knight, the three young nobles—are dead men to a certainty. By a miracle, I am preserved. It was evidently not ordained that I should die by a gunpowder explosion, as that assuredly must have been. I am preserved with these most valuable papers in my pockets: the certificates of the marriage of Cybele St. Liege and the birth of her daughter and only child, who has been named Pearl-line. Ho! now that I have accomplished my errand here, at the imminent risk of my life, let me be off at once. Only one thing more—the death of St. Liege, in vengeance for Corinne Bonville—and then, the last male of the line being exterminated, my life task is over. I think I shall demand, for these papers, the whole of that vast estate which must be fought for, but can be won, in Seville."

With a final glance at the tumult in and around the ruined and burning building, Paschal Broeck glided swiftly away, forgetting and not missing his pet snake from its coils about his body.

Had it not been that the building was so very long—much resembling the structure of a modern bowling-alley—and the office at the extreme rear, while the explosion occurred at the far front, it is more than possible that every living thing inside would have been shocked to death by the sudden and forcible concussion, the upheaval, ripping and scattering of fragments which ensued upon the fall of the torch into the canister of powder.

The two surviving nobles, pistols in hand, faced the mob that swarmed in through the doors and windows; Latour, gaining his feet, and with one foot planted hard on the flabby neck of Sergeant Killer, discharged his pistols at those who were scampering forward over the fallen wall.

Whizzing, thudding bullets, screams, groans, filled the air; and now a sheet of flame, lighting up all like noonday raved on a scene of carnage and destruction, showing Latour and the two nobles, almost back to back, confronting the tremendous odds at front and rear, firing rapidly and with deadly effect, for the surrounding was such as to render the mighty sword of Latour scarce available.

John Killer, in consternation, glanced up by twisting his head, and saw that the man who had one foot upon his neck was the terrible

Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume, whose pistols were dealing death right and left—for Latour seemed to be wonderfully supplied with these weapons, firing and casting them among the demonish rioters and as quickly supplying his hand with another from beneath the steel vest.

"Ho! Jupiter!" huskily aspirated the helpless sergeant, who anticipated that every next shot would be aimed downward into his own brain. "Ho! The Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume! Ten million to fifty, that he will whip everybody!—and I will thank my stars if I get off with a sound head. He has a heavy boot. It chokes me. But he is busy, now, and if I remind him of where that boot is planted, he may settle me with a bullet. By the horns of the moon! he carries a magazine under that vest of mail!"

Though many were shot down by the courageous trio, the frenzy of the mob was at such a pitch that blindness overcame all caution. On they pressed like a pack of hydrophobian beasts to devour and destroy.

At this juncture, one of the brave young nobles who fought in the doorway to the main store cried, to Latour:

"This is folly! We are beset by a hundred. To remain here is to be sacrificed. Is there no chance your way?"

"Follow me, then!" was the answering cry.

Latour's last pistol crashed into the brain of his nearest assailant. Then the great two-edged sword flashed from its sheath and lowered to a charge.

"Follow me!"

The three, though incumbered by their cloaks, rushed upon the few who, at the early order of Bezbel, were conducting the attack on the rear. It was an avalanche of steel and prowess. Like a whirlwind they moved through; and ere the dying or the living could realize, Latour and his two friends were off in the darkness.

Simultaneously the huge snake, in its paroxysms of rage and pain, struck upon the prostrate form of Sergeant Killer, and finding, at last, an animated thing upon which to vent its wrath—and before the sergeant could protect himself or call for assistance—it coiled around his neck and began to strangle out his life.

There was no pursuit of the escaping parties. Imitating all mobs, ever changeable on an impulse, a desire for plunder took possession of the dancing, hooting barbarians. Clothing flew in every direction; plankings were ripped up and chests broken open; the desk was bursted and its contents greedily snatched for. By the light of the flames on every hand, the packages of money buried in the cellar were discovered, dug up, and scattered amid huzzas of glee.

Jean Valasque was impoverished.

It was while Latour and his friends were fleeing from the locality of tumult—and at the same time that Captain Pollet St. Liege, with his small squad of musketeers, were marching briskly toward it—that the young man encountered Jean Valasque and Pearl-line.

"Quick!" he cried, supporting the insensible form of the maiden. "A hatful of water from that fountain yonder, one of you. Ah! my beloved Pearl-line. What has she not suffered this night? Hasten, friends; see! she is like one dead!"

The swoon was a brief one, and happiness beyond words entered her heart when she opened her eyes to find herself safe in the arms of the man she loved above all men.

"Latour! Dear Latour! It is Heaven itself that has brought us together," she breathed, fairly sobbing in the excess of her gladness.

"Ay, my sweet, it is Heaven that brought me to rescue you from that villain, Jean Valasque."

"Oh! but you wrong him, however bad he may be," and here she briefly related all that Valasque had done, to her knowledge, for her rescue from the Luxembourg, concluding with: "Dear Latour! I have heard, and from the lips of the same Monsieur Valasque, that which fills my heart with joy. Forgive me that I have always treated so coldly the love which you have given me and which I so dearly prize. Ask me not for an explanation now, but find Paschal Broeck, the apothecary. Do you not remember what he said in the tapestried chamber? Ah! he knows who I am. He has papers to prove everything. I know who and what I am. And oh! I may tell you freely, now, that I love you—I love you, Latour—I am yours. Find Paschal Broeck, and you can learn all. Whatever he demands, yield in my name. He has all to prove that I am what I am in truth; and that is why I dare say, without taint to you: Take me and keep me forever, for I love you—I love you—even as you have so patiently and dearly loved me!"

"My dear Pearl-line, the troubles of to-night have tried your soul," said Latour, soothingly, attributing this outburst to delirious excitement, yet thrilled to his soul's core by the sentences of her pure passion.

As he spoke, a door opened near by and a female stood on the threshold, regarding them curiously.

Latour addressed this woman.

"Madame, we have here a lady who is in sad

distress. I pray you receive and shelter her until she may see fit to re-accompany us."

"With pleasure—certainly, monsieur. Let her enter and welcome."

"Go you in here, dear Pearlina. This good woman will surely care kindly for you until I can find a better shelter. We have much to perform. My beloved mother is a prisoner in the Conciergerie, sentenced to the scaffold for tomorrow, although she cannot have had a trial. We must try to succor her. Go, my darling. Meantime, before I see you again, I will see Paschal Broeck upon what you have hinted. Wait for me, for I will surely come back to you."

With a rapturous kiss—the first he had ever been permitted to imprint upon her virgin lips since childhood—he hurried away with his companions.

The echo of a discharge of musketry sounded dully on the air, as Pearlina entered the humble and hospitable house of the strange woman.

Captain St. Liege had reached the scene of conflagration and pillage, where the people of adjoining buildings were striving to save their own property from the flames, while the mob continued its revel of plunder and torch.

Into the mass of rioters the musketeers poured a volley, and before their fire-locks were again ready—the rioters doubly maddened by this interference and the slaughter of many of their number—a general hand-to-hand conflict ensued in which the soldiery fared the worst.

Jean Valasque was running headlong, spurred by the idea that the Masked Knight was in hot pursuit of him, when he was suddenly gripped by the collar, and a panting voice exclaimed:

"Ha! you are the very man!"

Valasque dropped to his knees, with clasped hands in a supplicating attitude; for the voice of the man who held him, and the suddenness of his arrest, in his condition of extreme nervous agitation, iced his whole porpoise-like frame with fright.

"Whoever you are," he blubbered, dolefully, "take pity on a poor and honest clothes-dealer, air officer. I believe that my store is afire. Let me go and try to save my property."

"As I thought; you are Jean Valasque. I received information that a certain maiden, rescued from the Luxembourg, was to be found at your house. Instead I find a mob that has dispersed my soldiers and wounded me. I am Captain Pollet St. Liege."

"Most noble captain! It is true that the maiden was to have been brought there. I, myself, added the postscript to the information, for at the time of its inditing—and even now, if they are not all burned alive—my back and private office contained—for I was compelled at the pistol muzzle to harbor them—two young nobles, the Masked Knight of the Steel Vest and White Plume, and, also, Mazgarus, the magician—Paschal Broeck, apothecary, I mean—"

"Ha! Mazgarus, the magician!" repeated St. Liege, with a start.

"I meant only to have said Paschal Broeck; though he was once Mazgarus the magician."

Pollet St. Liege released the kneeling and cowering vagabond with a swirl that rolled him several feet over the pave. Then he bounded off in the darkness.

"Tis he! He!" hissed from his lips. "In Germany he was Mazgarus, the magician, when we first had a pass at daggers. It is Hurol Bonville, the last of the accursed Bonville race. Oh, that I had penetrated the disguise of the knave long ago! I could easily bring his head to the block; but that would be a cowardly fulfillment of the oath of St. Liege. Vendetta! Ha! ha! have your dagger ready, Hurol Bonville!"

And the habitually taciturn and moody St. Liege seemed excited beyond all curb, as he hastened toward the shop of the apothecary, which he knew was situated on Rue Vivienne.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT THE SCAFFOLD.

A DAY of extraordinary dampness dawned upon reeking Paris, to make mere deep the prevailing depression and the muttering voice of tumult.

Hundreds of hearts in the crowded prisons palpitated in dread, as the eyes opened to the first gray bluish of light, breaking like some sullen lantern of uncertainty behind portentous veiling.

At an early hour the keepers were astir and busy counting out the captives doomed to death at noon.

The rain that threatened the night before had fallen in torrents, and now settled down to a cold, shivering drizzle, through which the hurrying figures of men and women moved like phantoms in a mirage.

There were wailings, groans and prayers that day. Fend ties were to be severed by the red hand of the executioner, sweetest hopes nipped almost at the verge of bloom; the last caress, the sobs and tears of loved ones agonized the souls of all who saw, excepting those grim and scowling minions waiting to drag their victims forth, delighting in the wholesale sacrifice that might, ere long, involve even themselves.

Old and young, almost childhood, shrank aghast at the creeping prospect, for, though the

sun itself seemed shrouded as if in Heaven's horror of the crimes perpetrated on its very rising, none were spared who had been sent to the Conciergerie, whither our interest lies.

Madame Elise, who had not even been brought to trial—but who, through the fiendish devising of Captain St. Liege, was known to be among the fated number—stood like a statue of mute and apathetic despair with the others who had been hustled from their cells preparatory to their march to the scaffold on Rue de la Revolution.

She was pale as death, but not a look or action betrayed the natural torture of her mind; the expression of her face was that of simple resignation and anxiety for her soul alone. All thoughts, just then, were past, save those of prayer; and in the midst of such sorrowings and heartrending adieus she appeared to be crowned with the strength that none can have unless sustained by faith in the life to come and a retrospect of faultless deeds.

Quatorin was there. They were to make short work with this ruffian. Caught in the act of attempting to rob the guillotine of an illustrious victim, an order had been received at the Conciergerie to behead him at once and with the rest upon this occasion. He stood apart, with folded arms, moody, silent, yet trembling inwardly with a most cowardly fear.

"Would that I were like that woman," were his thoughts as he watched Madame Elise. "She seems no more disturbed by what is coming than if it was to be some holiday jaunt. Her lips move. She prays. Ah! that must be the secret. I have heard it said that those who could pray sincerely do not shrink at the presence of death. Well, I never learned to pray; and I dare not ask her intercession for me, because I have been too great a villain."

Presently a gun boomed, as if half-smothered in the distance. It was the signal to prepare.

In a few minutes the gun boomed again.

The prisoners were paired off, pushed forward and marched out.

Before the Conciergerie there was a large and standing procession of soldiery and a line of black-painted carts, each pulled by a single horse.

The victims were seated in these carts, bare-headed, exposed to the saturating rain and the view of a wedged, swaying, hooting rabble congregated to witness the daily march of those unfortunates sentenced to the block.

A company of cavalry was in the van; mounted guards ranged upon each side of the long line of somber carts; a platoon of musketeers brought up the rear.

A sickening sight—those helpless men and women to be devoured by the hungry glut of the tribunal.

A third gun roared upon the watery air. Its salvo was the signal for the march.

Forward moved the death procession, with scabbards clanking at the stirrup, horse-hoofs thudding and rapping dully on the muddy pave, the muffled tramp of the grim musketeers, and the drivers of the ghastly carts switching up their lean animals, while the polished sabers, right, left, and in front, pricked back and ahead the surging mob of citizens who gave vent to huzzas as the final salvo came to their ears from the distant gun and eagerly followed the procession.

Madame Elise and Quatorin were seated side by side in the same cart. As the dread moment approached nearer and nearer, all the cowardice ever dormant in his craven nature asserted and displayed itself. He quivered in every joint and his eyes rolled around from side to side, as if hoping that the numerous assassin band, of which he was a member, would essay his rescue. But, though he saw many familiar faces, none were foolhardy enough to raise hand or voice in his behalf.

The gaze of Madame Elise was turned upward to the leaden mantle of clouds, the rain streaming unmindful down upon her white face, as if she saw there already, the portal of that unknown "beyond" which soon was to be hers. A smile, faint, but of ineffable sweetness, wreathed her whispering lips. Her whole attitude—the thrilling calm and angelic mien—overwhelmed the hardened and cowardly Quatorin.

"Madame! whoever you are," he gulped, as if his half-savage breast was bursting with emotion, "in mercy's name, tell me how you can take this thing so quietly! Teach me—a man who has blasphemed for a lifetime—how to do the same, I beseech you."

The eyes of Madame Elise turned upon him; and if Quatorin possessed a soul, their soft, clear glance went deep, deep to its core, filling him with a tremor unlike anything he had ever known before.

"Repent, then, and you shall be forgiven. Poor man, have courage. We are to die to-day—but we shall wake to-morrow. Look up—up—far up. He is there, the Judge of the guilty, and the Savior of the righteous. Though red with wrong, your hands may be purified in that great stream of repentance where all must bathe before entering the temple of Heaven's glory. Repent, repent and pray, as I do. He will not forget, but sustain you."

"Ah! madame, I cannot pray; I never learned—"

"Then kneel, and I will pray for both."

The shaggy, shabby, ugly-faced Quatorin sunk to his knees like a child at her feet, and for a few moments listened, with bowed head, to the low, earnest words that Madame Elise uttered in appeal for him and herself.

A wondrous, indescribable sensation, almost delirium, seized the fellow. It was the first prayer that had ever been offered for Quatorin—treacherous, wicked Quatorin—the first kind voice that had ever spoken to or of him, and scalding tears, from eyes that had never wept till now, coursed down his bronzed and bristling cheeks.

"Madame!" he exclaimed, at last, "if God can hear so wicked a wretch as I am, let Him mark down my thanks to you for what you have said to him of me! Oh! if I could but live my life over, with that voice of prayer forever in my ears, I would be able to meet my Creator with an open face. Heaven bless and receive you, madame! But let me know, before I die, who you are that has done this kindness for me!"

"I am the Baronne de Cosgnac," answered that unfortunate lady.

"What! Possible! Why, madame, it is because of you that I am here. Last night I, and others bad as myself, were in a plot to rescue you from the Conciergerie. The plot was discovered—here is the consequence. I have been repeating to myself, the whole morning long: 'I have, at least, the consolation of knowing that I am to die in striving to do a good deed.'"

"Then be assured," said madame, gratefully pressing his horny palm, "that act is recorded to your credit, and will blot out much of an evil past—"

"Ha! there is the scaffold!" broke in Quatorin, with a start of dismay, and before madame could ask, as she had intended, who had conceived the plot, and its method, for her release.

"Courage, friend, courage. And now, since sacred commune together with God has formed a tie between us, my last desire in this world is, that you and all the others may be spared the misery of seeing me die."

Quatorin's distended eyes were fixed and staring ahead.

The cramming, jostling crowd that followed and surrounded the solemn procession now widened out as more room was gained by the arrival at Place de la Revolution, where another and larger congregation of both sexes awaited the hour of execution.

As the procession wheeled into Place de la Revolution, a loud cry went up from the expectant throng, being echoed back by the coming multitude, whose boisterous halloes rose above and drowned both the orders of the officers and the despairing moans of the doomed occupants of the death-carts.

The broad space and branching streets were packed with thousands of the gazing faces of vociferous humans, who paid no heed to the drenching drizzle of rain; and the scaffold was only protected from inevitable demolition by the breastwork of bayonets surrounding it, against the points of which more than one bosom was forced by the pressure from beyond.

Forward moved the procession, the fronts of the horses and the sharp sabers of the cavalrymen forcing, cutting, trampling a breach through the dense gathering.

When the carts were ranged around the scaffold, the excitement grew more intense.

Not far off, at one side, sitting cross-legged on a broken column, or pedestal, of marble, was the fat and flabby form of Jean Valasque. The face of the junk clothes-man was red with liquor, and his eyes, muddled and bloodshot, rolling and vacant, were the eyes of a wild man as they swept over the surging thousands to the group on the scaffold. Robbed of everything he had owned in the world; his store burned and stock and money scattered broadcast by the mob of the previous night, Jean Valasque had become a gibbering lunatic, taking at once and copiously to strong drink. Though his glance was toward the scaffold, and though he partook of the ardor which swayed the fanatical and deluded people, his mind was absorbed by another subject solely and continually, and his incessant muttering was:

"My money! My gold! My precious! My all! It is gone—gone. Oh, my money! I shall never get it back again, and will die a poor man at last. My curse on the nobility—on all aristocrats!—on everybody and everything that was the cause of my leaving my store to be pilaged! Oh, my gold!"

Close to the pedestal and glancing occasionally at Jean Valasque, were three rough-looking fishermen. But the disguise of clothes, whiskers and penciled faces could not conceal from the reader the presence of Latour de Cosgnac and his friends, the two young nobles.

Hardly had the long line of death carts ranged around the bloody scaffold when a fourth and final salvo belched from the signal-gun, and was followed by a fresh outburst on the part of the gazing population.

It is the task of history, and not of this story, to describe the curdling succession of decapita-

tions which ensued upon the fourth signaling roar of the cannon—the brutal and untiring arm of the executioner and the chopping thud of the great ax of the guillotine; for the scaffold, to expedite the horrible butchery, was a double one, having both guillotine and sword.

The turn of Madame Elise came last.

The shouts which had greeted each victim, as he or she mounted and knelt to receive the stroke, were not so loud, as her pale, calm face looked upon the hungry crowd. Many there had cause to remember her deeds of charity and kindnesses to the helpless and sick. In fact, it was not so long in the past that the name of Madame Elise had been a revered by-word, and the fruits of her gentle ministrations still existed in many a lowly home.

There were those who closed their eyes at sight of her, to shut out the operation of her death, and felt regret, withal she was one of the hated nobility—so great was the bond of gratitude on their consciences.

"Oh, God! this is more than I can endure!" groaned Latour, staggering in the arms of his companions. "My mother! To see her die thus, and I unable to defend her! Can Heaven permit so gross a deed?" and he buried his face in his hands, sobbing like a child.

The soulful eyes of Madame Elise at that moment rested upon the three fishermen. She saw the reeling and supported form and the action that told of his weeping. She could not catch a glimpse of his disguised face, but something whispered to the mother's heart that it was Latour, compelled thus, helplessly to witness her immolation. The smile on her lips grew fairly radiant, and for the first time tears trickled on her cheeks—tears of joy and thankfulness, even in that awful hour, to know that her darling son was still safe and free.

"God bless and preserve my son!" she breathed, at the moment that two men laid hold upon her, to force her to her knees for the stroke of the stained and reeking sword.

"Bear up, Monsieur Latour," urged one of his companions. "Remember this scene, be strong, and live for vengeance."

"They are murderers!" impetuously exclaimed the young man, in a loud tone.

"Who dared to make that speech? Point him out! Death to the nobility and all their sympathizers!" was the instant uproar.

One of the young nobles, with ready wit, and to save the life of Latour, promptly pointed to Jean Valasque, saying:

"It was he. That man up there."

A wild shriek burst from Jean Valasque, who was dragged from the pedestal, crushed to the ground and torn to pieces by a score of furious hands.

"Look! Look! Latour! What can be the meaning of that delay and trouble at the scaffold?"

A sudden commotion had occurred at the foot of the timbered steps, and a second later a female figure elbowed through the mass, raced up the steps and threw her arms around the person of Madame Elise.

It was Pearlina!

Her beautiful tresses floated in the wind and rain, and her lovely, eager and startled face, full of resentment and defiance, confronted the special few assembled on the scaffold.

"You must not!—you shall not!" she screamed, desperately. "Have you not blood enough, already! Spare her!—or strike first through me!—for the same blow that takes her life must take mine, too! Strike!—strike now, while we stand thus!—but let the blade reach me first!"

The wonderful beauty and daring courage of the maiden produced an immediate and singular effect.

The Deputies of the Committees announced, with one voice:

"The life of Madame Elise is spared; but she must quit France and never return."

A murmur passed from lip to lip; then a huzza that rent the air with an enduring echo arose from the ever-fluctuating and impulsive French people.

The act of heroism touched a home chord in their spirit, and cheer after cheer greeted the savior and the saved as they were borne away in the same death-cart that had brought Madame Elise to the scaffold.

Had Captain Poilet St. Liege been present, according to his full intention, the rescue of Madame Elise would never have transpired. But St. Liege was not there, for a very good reason, nor had he been seen or heard of during the whole of that morning.

There is little more to add.

Pearline and her lover were thus strangely reunited, and the life of Madame Elise saved, through the goodness of Providence. The three fled to Germany.

Before their departure, however, Latour had visited the shop of the apothecary on Rue Vivienne, and obtained at the hands of Perru—who he bribed liberally—the casket which contained all the valuable papers requisite to prove the name and title of Pearlina to the vast estates of her martyred father, Count Andrew.

A ghastly tableau was discovered in the laboratory of the chemist.

Flat on the floor, upon his back, Poilet St. Liege. Above and astraddle of him was Paschal Broeck. In the forehead of the latter, having penetrated all obstruction of bone, was a dagger driven to the hilt and still wedged firmly there. The white, sinuous fingers of the apothecary were coiled and gripped, rigid and frozen, at the neck of St. Liege. Both had perished in the encounter which the captain sought when he learned that Paschal Broeck was his old enemy, by the oath of vendetta, Hurrol Bonville.

The beautiful Pearlina was wedded at last to her faithful lover, Latour de Cosnac, and when they were joined by the Baron de Cosnac—which happened when the disguised nobleman had followed the fortunes of Bonaparte until the latter was crowned emperor in the church of Notre Dame—these four became a wondrously happy and affectionate household, content with all that tends to beautify and comfort life, and caring naught for additional riches that might or might not have resulted from extensive litigation over the hereditary estates of St. Liege in Seville.

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